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SFX

260

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1931-2015

NIMOY REMEMBERED

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MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

DIRECTOR AND STARS TALK CAR-NAGE

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DAREDEVIL
Marvel goes dark on Netflix!

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Another attack of the clones!

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO
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PLUS SIR TERRY PRATCHETT • JIM BUTCHER • THE ENFIELD HAUNTING
THE BEST COMICS OF SFX'S LIFETIME • CRIMSON PEAK • MOOMINS
GOOSEBUMPS • GOTHAM'S FISH MOONEY • THE LAST MAN ON EARTH • MORE!

Future

THE BATTLE FOR EARTH BEGINS

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ZOO

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WELCOME TO SFX 260
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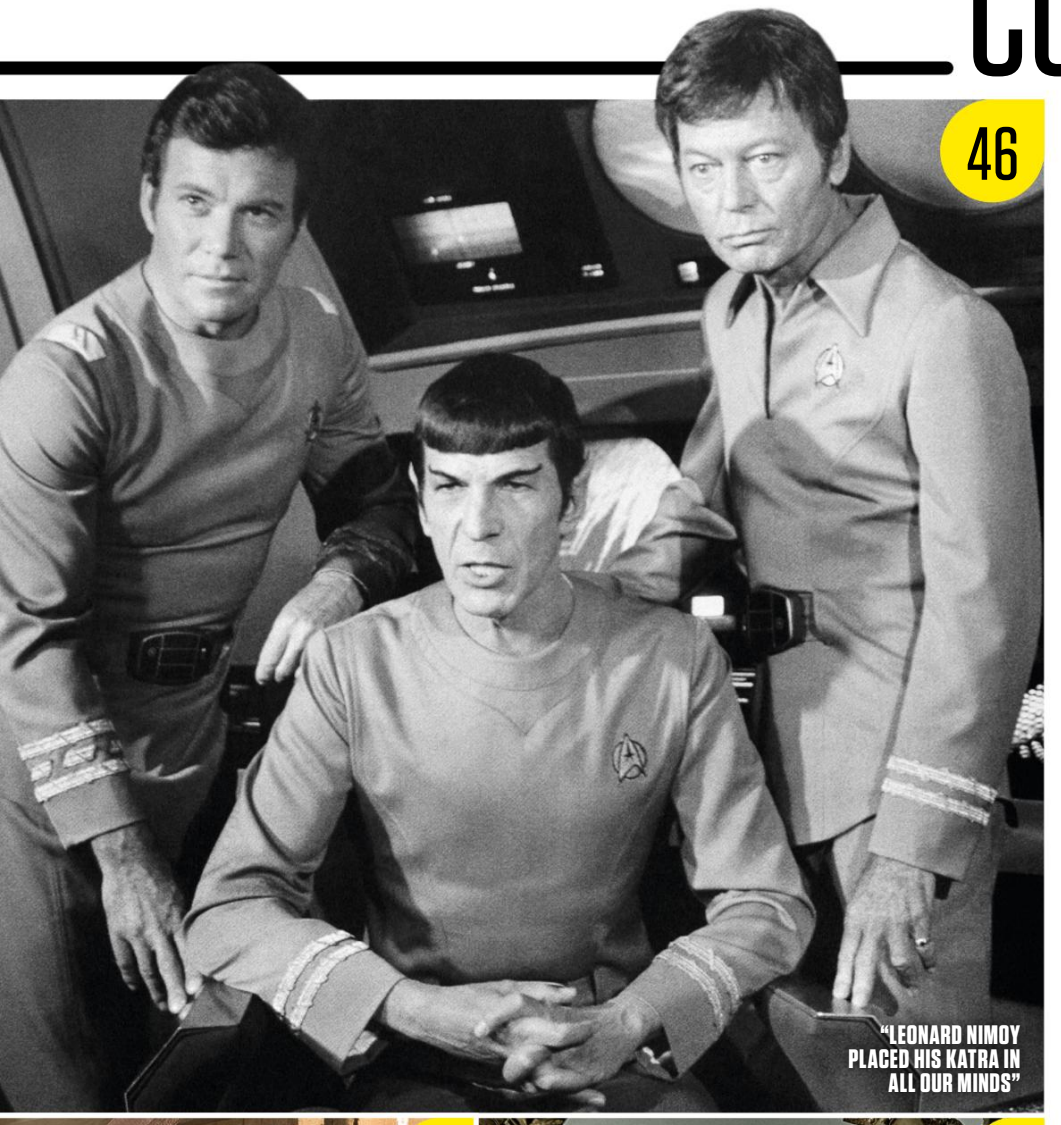

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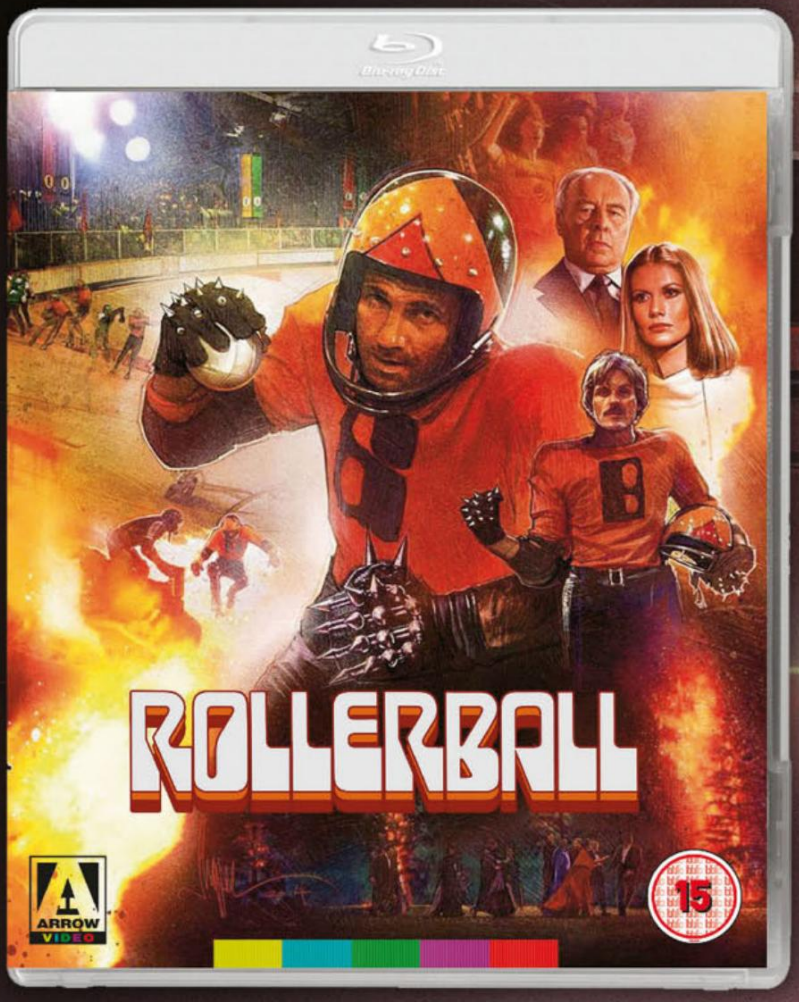
IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE
VHS WILL NO LONGER EXIST
BUT THERE WILL BE BLU-RAY



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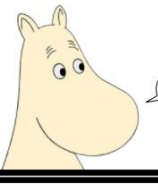

The Inside Skinny

What your *SFX* chums are thinking about...

Richard Edwards
Editor

RAVES
- Thank you James Gunn for speaking out against Hollywood types who moan about the quantity of superhero movies. It's not big-budget actioners that are a problem – it's bad movies. Luckily we're living in a little golden age of genre blockbusters – long may it continue.
- It's just a title right now, but *Star Wars: Rogue One* sounds intriguing.

Nick Setchfield
Features Editor

RAVES
- Finally caught up with season one of *Penny Dreadful*, just in time for season two. Just my cup of dark Victorian tea.

RIP
- It's never easy writing obits for your heroes but it was a privilege to pay tribute to Leonard Nimoy this issue. Second star on the right, straight on till morning...

Ian Berriman
Home Entertainment Editor

RAVES
- Current listening: "Soft Rains" by Zarelli, which samples a 1975 recording of Leonard Nimoy narrating one of Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*.
- Pleased to see that Larry Cohen's *God Told Me To* has got an all-region Blu-ray release.
- Check out stuff tucked away on Netflix UK like *Robinson Crusoe On Mars* and *The Skull*.

Jordan Farley
Community Editor

RIP
- Goodbye Mr Nimoy and Sir Terry – too much sadness for one month.

RAVES
- Thrilled Neill Blomkamp is making a new *Alien* film, but not keen on the idea of it seemingly disregarding *Alien 3* or *Resurrection*.
- Adored the final season of *Parks And Rec*, which was set in the future!

Alex Cox
Operations Editor

RAVES
- Bit behind (as usual) but I thought *Edge Of Tomorrow* was great. The Cruiser is the ultimate in movie value, so much so that I completely forgot about Bill Murray by the end of it.
- Another thing-o-recommend for those of you with kids: *Pancake Manor* on YouTube. Infectious Muppety singsongs with topics like space, superheroes and haircare products.

Russell Lewin
Production Editor

RAVES
- *It Follows*: unusual and bracing. Worth seeing.
- The Horror Channel has come to Freeview! This is very good news.
- Okay, so a semi-fantasy, *Birdman*, won the Best Film Oscar, but *Boyhood* was robbed.
- Finally watched *Edge Of Tomorrow*. First half ingenious and fun, second half more of a generic action blockbuster.

Jonathan Coates
Art Editor

RAVES
- Daniel Craig looks very cool in a *Live And Let Die*-inspired costume for the latest *SPECTRE* teaser poster. Mendes and Craig are both excellent so I have high hopes for this.

RANTS
- Waited 25 years for another *Ghostbusters* movie and now I couldn't be less interested. No Bill, no *Ghostbusters*. That's the rule.

Dave Bradley
Group Ed-in-Chief

RIP
- Leonard Nimoy was an incredible actor and an icon of TV and cinema. I've been rewatching the *Star Trek* movies in Spock's honour.
- News of Sir Terry Pratchett's final encounter with Death filled me with sadness. Will always have very fond memories of the times we met, including him visiting our offices to guest edit issue 196.

Adrian Hill
Ad Manager

RIP
- This past 20 years with *SFX*, I've been fortunate to have met many of my heroes from TV and screen, but one particular actor I met a few years ago, really does bring back fond memories. A very intelligent, and charming man, with such a distinguished voice. An actor known to millions around the world and loved by so many. I have been, and always shall be, your fan. Leonard Nimoy (1931-2015)

Nick Chen
Web Genius

RAVES
- Festival highlights include Australian time-travel romcom *The Infinite Man* and futuristic kung-fu hip-hop musical *Tokyo Tribe*. The latter earns bonus points for a butler who beat-boxes without spilling any tea.

RANTS
- The 3D CGI *Peanuts Movie* is like Charlie Brown kicking Lucy's football – it should never happen.

Rosie Fletcher
Acting Editor, Total Film

RAVES
- The winner of the inaugural James Herbert award for horror writing is due to be announced soon. I was on the judging panel for this and I can assure you there's some glorious, wee-inducing stuff in the shortlist.
- When can it be time for *Mad Max*? We've waited 30 years for this, can it hurry up already.

Tara Bennett
US Editor (East Coast)

RAVES
- Still basking in the glow of *Agent Carter*'s run while crossing every digit with hopes of a renewal. And I can attest that Marvel's next TV series, *Daredevil*, is one hell of a success too.

RANTS
- Wish I could say the adaptation of one of my favourite graphic novel series, *Powers*, was a lot better. Hope it improves.

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The word "legend" gets overused a *lot*, but this month sci-fi and fantasy lost two people completely deserving of the word – Leonard Nimoy and Sir Terry Pratchett.

As Spock, Nimoy helped turn many young minds onto the infinite possibilities of sci-fi, his portrayal of the Vulcan science officer – over a period of nearly 50 years! – helping bring strange new worlds into millions of living rooms.

Pratchett will go down as one of the greats of fantasy literature, a unique, prolific voice who transcended genre, telling stories that may have been set in a world on the back of a giant turtle, but told us a hell of a lot more about our world than most real-world authors could ever hope for.

Earth is a considerably less appealing planet without them, and we've celebrated both men this issue. There'll also be a larger tribute to Pterry next issue.

The genre Nimoy and Pratchett helped shape evolves apace, and this month we've gone behind the scenes of *Mad Max* sequel *Fury Road*, as well as some of the hottest TV shows around: *Game Of Thrones*, *Orphan Black* and *Daredevil* to name but three. We're also ramping up the celebrations for our upcoming 20th anniversary, with the 20 greatest comics of our lifetime – the first in our 20/20 series counting down the best genre TV shows, movies and books of the last two decades. We're going to mark the occasion in style, so look out for *SFX*'s mega 20th Anniversary Collector's Edition, on sale Wednesday 29 April.

Richard Edwards, Editor
@RichDEdwards

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RED ALERT

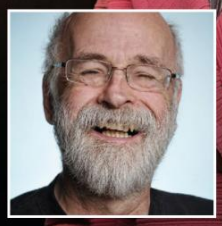
THE FUTURE FIRST

edited by Jordan Farley

THE ENFIELD HAUNTING

Spook Central

Britain's best-known ghost story is set to scare up the small screen



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SIR TERRY PRATCHETT
A tribute to the Discworld creator, who passed away in March.

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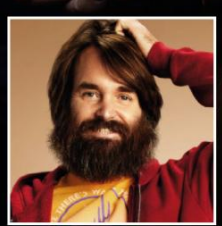
SUITS SHOE, SIR
Adam Sandler gets a shoe-based superpower (sort of) in *The Cobbler*.



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MAN THE FORTE
Saturday Night Live alum Will Forte is *The Last Man On Earth*.

EXCLUSIVE WRITER INTERVIEW

IN 1977 POLICE WERE called to the home of single parent Peggy Hodgson, a mother of four whose daughters, Margaret and Janet, witnessed something inexplicable in their bedroom – and we're not talking about the abundance of tartan on their Bay City Rollers poster. Objects flying around the room, strange noises emanating from the walls... and that was only the beginning. Two years of headline-grabbing hauntings followed in the most unlikely of locations – a council house in the North London borough of Enfield. Now the tale of local terror is heading to TV as three-part drama *The Enfield Haunting*.

The real-life incident remains one of the best documented cases of poltergeist activity on record and went on to inspire a wave of Hollywood films, from Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* to this year's *Conjuring* sequel (subtitled *The Enfield Poltergeist*). For writer Joshua St Johnston it was the opportunity to tell an authentic home-grown horror story that initially appealed.

"What's incredibly exciting is that we're taking back ownership of this very British ghost story," St Johnston tells Red Alert. "One of the breakthrough moments in terms of getting my head around the mood and how to tell the story was seeing a floor plan of the house and that the bathroom was on the ground floor at the back, next to the garden. There's something so '70s and so British about that kind of house and so potentially the stuff of horror. This is a celebration of a particular way of living at a particular time."

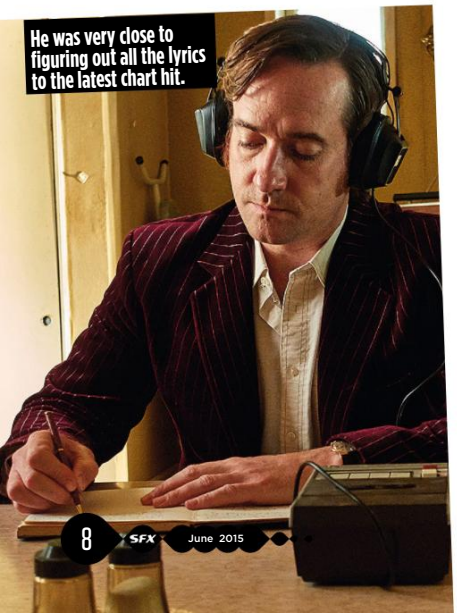
The original British production made by Sky Living boasts a director from Scandi-sensation *The Killing*, Kristoffer Nyholm, ↪

SCI-FACT!
The BBC's seminal horror mockumentary *Ghostwatch* was based on the Enfield Poltergeist case.

Somebody's forgotten to buy the butterscotch Angel Delight...

GHOST WATCH

Tales from the house of horror



He was very close to figuring out all the lyrics to the latest chart hit.

NO EASY ANSWERS

1 The real-life case remains tantalisingly unsolved, and St Johnston was keen to preserve that ambiguity in the show. To an extent. "At the start of the process I was very keen. But as it went on I thought a story demands answers at certain points, and even if they're not final answers you've got to keep moving things forward. What we've ended up with I think you can interpret in different ways, so there are answers there if you want them, but I suppose the ambiguity has been deliberately preserved."

TRUE DETECTIVE

2 For St Johnston, having a wealth of material to draw on proved an advantage. "It felt like a huge resource because it sparked off ideas in my mind and there's plenty of material. For example, if a moment came where I thought, 'Something scary needs to happen now' somewhere in my mind I would have a hundred scary things that happened at Enfield that I could choose from. It means certain choices are much easier to make and it frees up your mind to deal with some of the tougher choices."

GIRL TROUBLE

3 *Matilda The Musical*'s Eleanor Worthington-Cox plays Janet Hodgson, the apparently possessed child swept up in a media whirlwind. Finding the right person wasn't easy. "Within a sentence she will be possessed by the spirit of a malevolent 70-something man and be a frightened girl again," St Johnston says. "The central thing she does so brilliantly is play a sparky 11-year-old girl who, despite there being a poltergeist who is terrorising her, never loses that girlish, playful quality."

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STRONG BONDS

4

"Maurice's wife Betty was a difficult character to write because Maurice and Betty in real life had a fantastically strong marriage, which I have celebrated, but in a drama you want to make things tough for them," St Johnston says. "At one point I'd written a row between them that ended with Betty slapping Maurice and their son, who was an advisor, said: 'That would never, ever have happened.' So we took it out. But we found a good story to tell with them, to do with losing a child."

And there was no phone hacking involved, okay?

and a cast of familiar favourites including Timothy Spall, Matthew Macfadyen and Juliet Stevenson, alongside relative newcomers Eleanor Worthington-Cox and Fern Deacon, who play the Hodgson daughters. Spall stars as Maurice Grosse – the fuzzy-lipped paranormal investigator who – along with the more sceptical Guy Lyon Playfair (Macfadyen) – observed a series of unexplained events at the house, including levitation and the voice of a deceased former resident emerging from Janet.

For St Johnston, it was important that a solid emotional core underpinned the scares, something true-life tragedy provided. "A crucial part of this story for me was the fact that this lead psychic investigator, Maurice, had lost a daughter called Janet in a motorbike accident the year before, and that Janet had lost her father in as much as he had left the family home," St Johnston explains. "It felt like whatever the supernatural story there could also be these real-world emotions of loss and emotional need that were underpinning it all, something to set against the scary stuff."

St Johnston was spoilt for choice when it came to documentation on the case, citing Adam Curtis's online essay "The Ghosts In The Living Room" and Guy Lyon Playfair's book "This House Is Haunted" as particularly valuable resources. "Guy doesn't have the same baggage as Maurice, and has a lot more experience so is therefore, arguably, more sceptical. They make a very funny double act because Maurice is warm and empathetic and trusting and Guy, in the way I've written him, is a bit more academic, writerly, and doesn't always care quite what the reaction to what he says or does is."

"There's something very dark and dangerous happening in that house"

Although St Johnston was too young to remember the case when it happened, the '70s is not a decade he's ever forgotten. "It was an extraordinary time. I remember what the '70s was like and what an incredibly different world it was. I think that is part of people's interest in the story, and that's what Adam Curtis writes about so brilliantly in that online essay – the strangeness of seeing an exorcism against the background of swirly wallpaper."

As for scares, the show won't skimp on them but keeps largely to the facts, resisting the urge to go Full *Exorcist*. "There was levitating in the real case, fits, objects being thrown around, strange figures being seen in the house and a number of different voices coming out of Janet and Margaret's mouths, so we do all that," St Johnston says. "Lots of very disturbing and unexplainable stuff happens. Sometimes it's to do with surprises, sometimes it's to do with the apprehension of what's going to happen.

"But having said all that it doesn't feel over the top because it all relates to stuff that actually happened. And there's so much material we weren't able to get into three hours. In a way it's quite pared back. There isn't a devil and there's no head rotating 360 degrees, but I would say it can get quite *Exorcisty*. There's something very dark and dangerous and surprising happening in that house, and you never know where it's going to manifest next." SFX

The Enfield Haunting premieres on Sky Living in May and will be available On Demand.

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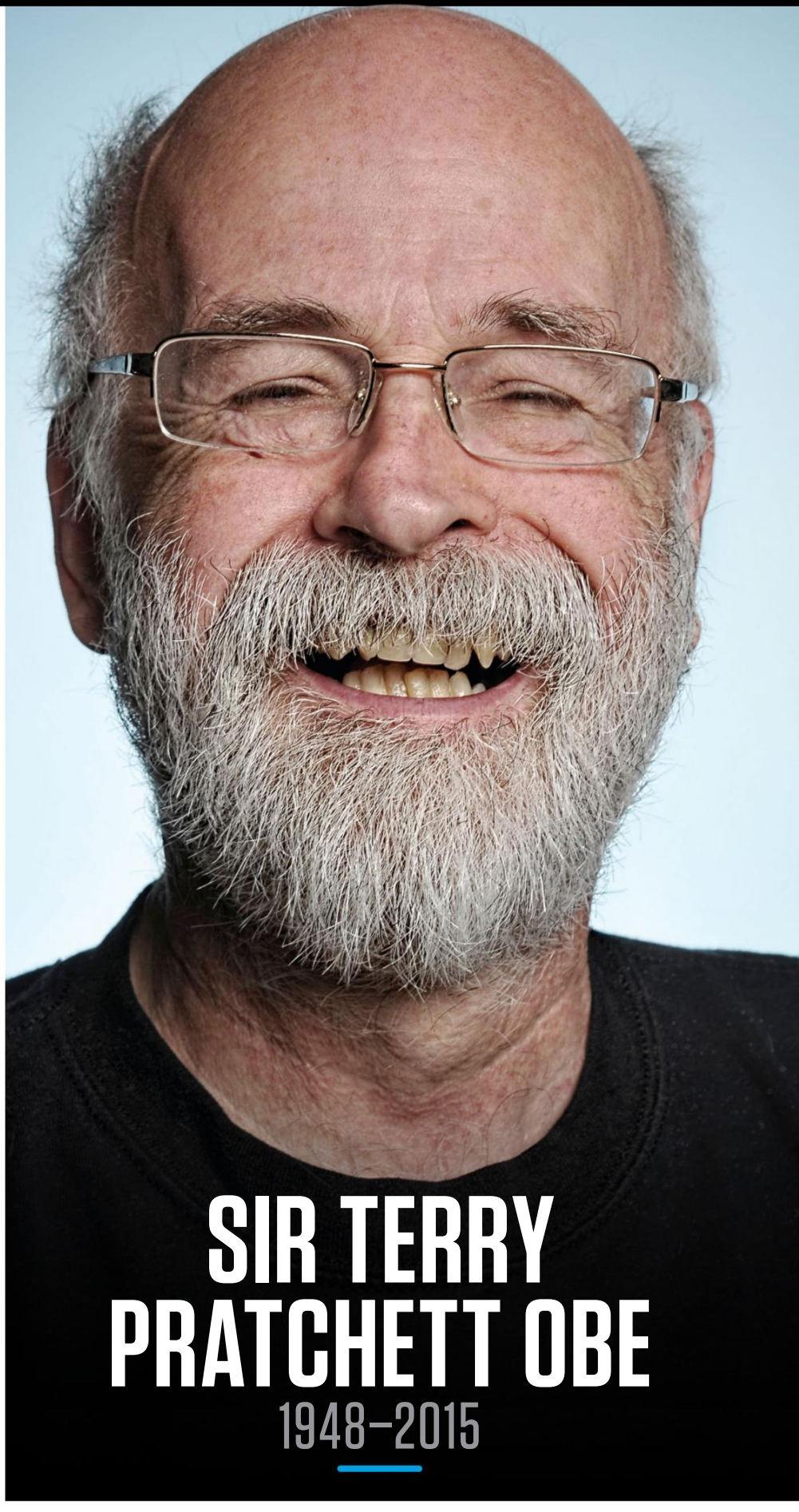

PORTRAIT BY JESSE WILD

Rob Power remembers the beloved *Discworld* author

A SILENCE HAS FALLEN UPON THE Disc. In the alleys of Ankh-Morpork the stabbing ceases, and in the halls of the Unseen University the wizards pause between courses. A tear the size of a lake rolls down the cheek of Great A'Tuin. The Creator is gone. Somebody pass the brandy.

Sir Terry Pratchett died on 12 March 2015 aged 66, and has thus far remained dead. It's still hard to believe, as if some terrible mistake has been made, but Death makes no such mistakes. We know, because thanks to Pterry, we've met him.

It's testament to the man's talents that many of us count a seven foot tall skeleton among our most cherished fictional creations. Of course, Death was far from the only denizen of the Discworld to make such a mark. How many lives were touched by Granny Weatherwax, by Rincewind, or by that quintessential Pratchett scrapper, Sam Vimes? For all its trolls and vampires, talking dogs and walking luggage, the Disc will ultimately be remembered because it was so very human.

Every Pratchett novel felt like it was written just for you. The delicately crafted gags, the characters you could almost smell, the many and varied uses of the word "ook" – they've become a common currency, an understanding among the initiated that to read Pratchett is to have your head, heart and funny bone rewired, fused into something different, something, well, fantastic.

He showed us how alive and vital fantasy could be, how full of possibility. He taught us how to think – to *really* think. He taught us to love words, to respect stories, to never treat people as things. And he taught us that a wizard's staff always has a knob on the end.

His relationship with *SFX* spanned two decades. Alongside countless interviews and reviews, he guest-edited the magazine and appeared at the *SFX* Weekender in 2011. His passion for bacon sandwiches knew no bounds, and he was as large in life as he was on the page. We will never forget his formidable presence, his irrepressible humour, or his hat. It was, to be fair, a bloody great hat.

It's fitting that a man whose coat of arms bore the motto *Noli Timeri Messorem* (Don't fear the reaper) departed to meet the greatest anthropomorphic personification of them all from his home, surrounded by family, with his cat asleep beside him. Not that he wasn't angry about the whole situation, and rightly so.

The Embuggerance, as he called the rare form of early onset Alzheimer's disease he was diagnosed with in 2007, cast a shadow over his final few years. But he fought it with characteristic courage, publishing books until the last and tirelessly raising awareness about a cruel condition that few have faced as fearlessly as he did.

We have been robbed of the very best of us. Terry Pratchett was brilliant. He was furious, he was hilarious, and he was taken too soon. But take solace. Because somewhere under an octarine sky, there is a large black hat and a brandy, and the story continues to be told. SFX

There'll be more on Terry's life and work next month.

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MOOMINS ON THE RIVIERA

Out Of The Valley

The Moomins take a big-screen holiday

THE FIRST MOOMINS adaptation for the big or small screen to be based on one of Tove Jansson's original comic stories, *Moomins On The Riviera* takes the loveable cartoon family out of their element. Directed by Xavier Picard, it sees Moomin, Moominpappa and Moominmamma – along with Snorkmaiden and Little My – setting sail for the exclusive seaside resort after an encounter with some pirates.

"We wanted to offer something new and fresh for the people who already know the Moomins," producer Hanna Hemila tells Red Alert. "And for those who don't know the Moomins, we wanted to take them out of Moominvalley, because if we did a story that's set in the Valley then it's difficult to explain what they are, and how different they are."

In a stark contrast to computer-generated animated films like *Home* and *Big Hero Six*, *Moomins On The Riviera* is rendered in a simple hand-drawn style with a limited monochrome palette that harks back to Jansson's pencil drawings. "When you look at her comic strips, the individual panels and the whole composition itself are very carefully thought out as she uses very few lines in her designs," explains Hemila. "So going for 3D animation, for example, would have felt totally wrong. We didn't look to follow the other styles that are dominant right now; we wanted to create our own style from her original style."

As the Moomin comics were serialised in London's *Evening News* in the 1950s and '60s, the English voice cast was of special significance to Hemila, who must have been especially pleased with Russell Tovey's performance in the crucial role of Moomin himself. "He has a really nice voice for Moomin because right from the start, one of the issues was 'What age is Moomin?'" explains Hemila. "He isn't a grown-up and he's not a child either as he has a girlfriend. We decided that he would be somewhere in his teenage years and Russell has a really nice voice for that." SFX

Moomins On The Riviera is released on Friday 22 May.

SCI-FACT! 120,000 drawings on paper were scanned for the making of *Moomins On The Riviera*.

The Moomins are looking good considering they date from 1945.

MY SCI-FI

Robert Rodriguez

The *From Dusk Till Dawn* head honcho likes his fantasy snappy

FAVOURITE SF/FANTASY FILM

Jaws. It opened on my birthday when I was seven years old, 20 June 1975. So *Jaws* is my biggest influence probably. When Greg Nicotero found out my birthday was the day *Jaws* was released he was like, "Oh, I'm so jealous! Oh my god, I wish I was born on *Jaws* day!" That's how he always remembers my birthday. He goes, "I know, because it was the day *Jaws* was released." We went on a great white shark dive — I took him for his 40th birthday, and we came *this* close to getting munched.

FAVOURITE SF/FANTASY TV

Well, *The X-Files*. I think that was one of my favourite sci-fi shows. *Kolchak* when I was a kid, *The Night Stalker*. That was the first one I saw that really jazzed me as a kid.

FAVOURITE SF/FANTASY COMICS

I grew up with *Savage Sword Of Conan* — the John Buscema stuff — and learning to draw from that. I loved that magazine. Because it was oversized, it was black-and-white, so it was easier to learn anatomy and to learn to draw. I used to collect that. That was my favourite. I also collect Frank Frazetta's original [*Conan*] art.

FAVOURITE SF/FANTASY HERO

As a kid, it was probably Spider-Man and Batman, the typical ones. Spider-Man because he could run around and jump around and spin webs. Then Batman because he had cool gear.

From Dusk Till Dawn Season Two comes to Netflix later this year.

GETTY (1)

SCI-FACT!
Thomas McCarthy co-wrote Pixar's *Up* and was Oscar-nominated for his efforts.

Adam Sandler's thinking, "They might be uncomfortable but I'll look *stunning*!"

Dustin Hoffman plays the father who has a long-kept secret.

THE COBBLER

Sole Man

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...
Adam Sandler's shape-shifting comedy drama

IT STARTED WITH A SAYING

1 Everything from books to boardgames have inspired Hollywood movies, but writer/director Thomas McCarthy's starting point for *The Cobbler* was an old adage. "I was wondering the origins of the expression 'not really knowing a man until you walk a mile in his shoes', and then I started thinking about it as an idea and how simple it was and that I'd never seen it on screen before," McCarthy tells Red Alert. "Also, I actually lived above a cobbler at the time, so a couple of events were the seed of the idea for this film."

ADAM SANDLER PLAYS IT STRAIGHT

2 Sandler stars as Max, a fourth generation Jewish cobbler who discovers a magical sewing machine that allows him to take on a person's appearance while wearing their shoes. But with McCarthy at the helm don't expect to see Sandler's usual slap-shtick. "I think because of Adam's casual nature in a lot of his movies, which is a persona, people don't realise how hard he works and how seriously he takes things," McCarthy says. "He immediately found a cobbler in LA and would send me video clips of himself sanding a leg or using a sewing machine. He got pretty good at it."

IT'S A SUPERHERO STORY. SORT OF

3 Naturally, Max's mundane existence is turned upside down by his new power. "We were always trying to see it through the lens of: 'What would this guy do?'" McCarthy explains. "He would probably try and meet a beautiful lady for a meal. Maybe he would go for a spin in a guy's car. Max has had a straightforward life and suddenly he has the opportunity to step out of it. We didn't know what this movie was when we started out. As we got closer to the end a fable-like quality was emerging and we realised Max was a neighbourhood superhero of sorts."

TOP OF THE HOFFS

4 The film has a strong supporting cast, including rapper-turned-actor Method Man, rising star Dan Stevens and Hollywood legend Dustin Hoffman, who plays Max's mysteriously absent father. "Dustin plays a guy who did exactly what Max does – discover this sewing machine, abuse it, get in over his head and arrive at a place where the best thing for him to do is disappear," McCarthy says. "It felt like we were doing black box theatre, we had all these wonderful actors from different backgrounds."

A DIRECTOR OF ICE AND FIRE

5 McCarthy directed the unaired pilot for *Game Of Thrones* and is partly to thank for casting Peter Dinklage after the pair worked together on *The Station Agent*. "Pete was our first choice," McCarthy says. "[David Benioff and DB Weiss] approached him and asked if I would talk to him. It seems like a no-brainer now, but at the time I think Pete was looking at it and wasn't sure – and obviously he made the right choice. It was pretty obvious early on, even from the pilot, that he was the perfect fit." SFX

The Cobbler is released on Friday 22 May.

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You expected salmon and cod...?

SURFACE TENSION

Dead Sea

There's something under the waves in new comic

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF humanity's presence on the planet are never far from the headlines. *Surface Tension*, a new five-issue, creator-owned series from writer/artist Jason Gunn asks: if somebody had the power to change the world would things get better? Or would it just go horribly wrong?

"I wanted to make a story *about* something – the debate about saving the planet," Gunn tells Red Alert. "Nothing is clear-cut in real life and I really wanted to get that across in the story, among all the action and the monsters!"

Set amid a small island community one year after a mysterious sea sickness caused 99% of the world's population to walk out into the oceans and never return, two of the infected emerge from the waves with blue skin and no memory of who they are or where they've been. Meanwhile biologists Megumi Suzuki and Eric Gravinsky discover an object capable of cleaning the world's waters – something that could save or destroy mankind.

"The islanders don't have any real understanding of how the sickness works," Gunn explains. "As the memories of the two survivors return we start to learn more about how this event originated and what it means for us. The first issue is quite a small snapshot, but it starts opening up as every issue is released. The mystery is unlocked issue by issue."

With a colourful art style and creature design influenced by the films of Hayao Miyazaki, Gunn was keen to distance his tale from the doom and gloom of other eco-pocalypse stories. "One thing I was very mindful of with the story was not to make it too hippyish or too depressing, because I wanted to do something that actually was quite hopeful about the future, among all the destruction that was going on in the story." SFX

Surface Tension is released by Titan on 27 May.

AERIAL ASSAULT
SF TV ROUND UP

NEWBIES

- Former Fireflies Alan Tudyk and Nathan Fillion team up for crowd-funded convention comedy **CON MAN**.
- Robert Kirkman's **WALKING DEAD** prequel show gets a two-season order at AMC.
- John Barrowman adapting *Heavy Metal* series **THE 49TH KEY** – a fantasy tale featuring Enochian magic.
- Ray Palmer, Captain Cold, Dr Martin Stein and Sarah Lance rumoured for an **ARROW/FLASH** spin-off.
- ITV to reboot **THE SAINT**. Giant ants currently unconfirmed.
- Matt Fraction and Kelly Sue DeConnick making **SEX CRIMINALS** for Universal TV.
- Film and TV rights for classic boardgame **SETTLERS OF CATAN** acquired by *Perfect Storm* producer Gail Katz.
- Classic comic character **DREADSTAR** being developed for TV by Universal.
- Giant insect comic **ENORMOUS** heading to Fox as an event series.
- Amazon Studios rebooting Sid and Marty Krofft's **SIGMUND AND THE SEA MONSTERS**.

Continued on p17...

DON'T QUOTE ME

"It can be done well and it can be done shit. The best CGI has you forgetting its CGI, and accepting the visual as whatever it is supposed to be. Like props. No one has an issue with 'props' in film, do they?"

Don't slag off CGI in front of Duncan Jones.

SCI-FACT!
Surface Tension creator Jason Gunn first learnt about *The Walking Dead* comic from our reviews.

SALEM

Witch Wars

The magic hits the fan in the Salem Witch drama

They'd all be smiling if they only had a house.

AFTER A FIRST SEASON THAT saw witch Mary Sibley reunited with her long-lost child, *Salem* returns for 13 new episodes in its second year. "All of the things that make *Salem*, *Salem* are there," co-creator and executive producer Brannon Braga tells *SFX*. "But we're also expanding the world. We're going to see other places. We're going to see other characters, including Lucy Lawless playing Countess Marburg, who is an ancient Germanic witch. She's sensed that Mary has completed the Grand Rite and she's coming to Salem to get her. She's poses a terrible threat to Mary."

Also joining the cast is Stuart Townsend. "He plays a character named Samuel Wainwright," comments Braga, "and he's drawn to Salem by the terrible plague that has been unleashed by the Grand Rite, but he doesn't know it's a witch pox. He thinks it's a regular pox, and he's come to help. He takes a personal interest in Mary Sibley, and we learn through Mary that this guy is not everything he seems to be, and has some very dark, strange obsessions.

British actor Joe Doyle also joins the cast as Countess Marburg's son. "They have a strange, incestuous relationship. They *call* each other mother and son and we *think* they're mother and son, but we can't be sure," Braga says. "He's gonna turn out to be a very nasty character himself. There are maternal themes running through this year, about mothers and sons.

"There was smallpox throughout Salem at this time," adds Braga. "And that's what gave us the idea. It's like, 'Okay, this happened in history, but our spin is the witches are controlling it.' There are strange supernatural acts of magic that we took right from the transcripts of the witch trials. Stranger stuff than you can even imagine." SFX

Salem season two starts 5 April on WGN America.

Unfriended might well strike a chord with a lot of people...

SCI-FACT!
Unfriended **was previously called *Cybernatural* – a name so bad it's brilliant.**

UNFRIENDED

Cyber Killer

The ghost's in the machine in this webcam horror

ONLINE BULLYING CAN HAVE deadly consequences, but it's never been as lethal as it is in *Unfriended*, a supernatural horror film in which a cyber-bullying victim exacts revenge on her online tormentors from beyond the grave, via Skype. "The things we do in our non-digital lives vary greatly from country to country, but our behaviour online is universal," says *Unfriended* director Levan Gabriadze, making his feature debut. "There is so much drama built into our daily computing lives, and horror is the perfect vehicle in which to prey on it."

One year after Laura Barnes posted her suicide online (a suicide prompted by an embarrassing video of Laura that went viral), six of her high school colleagues get together for a Skype chat. They're soon joined by a mysterious seventh person, someone who knows a lot about them and what happened a year earlier; someone who wants to inhabit their souls through their desktops. "With the veil of the internet's anonymity, anybody can become a bully, and the temptation is great," says Gabriadze. "We drew on the massive trend of teens hanging out online in group video chats instead of in person. With a dark history of cyber-bullying, the friends in the film must confront their online sins. In other films, the danger comes in the form of ghosts and haunted houses, but in *Unfriended*, the ghosts have a new playground: the internet."

Unfriended elevates the contained horror format to a new level with the entire film taking place on Skype through the eyes of Blaire, the film's teenage protagonist played by Shelley Hennig (*Teen Wolf*, *Ouija*). "It's a found-footage film because the whole movie takes place on Blaire's laptop screen," says Gabriadze, who developed technology that enabled Hennig and her fellow actors to see and hear each other at all times during the filming. "It's as if the entire movie was recorded off of Blaire's laptop for 90 minutes."

Unfriended is being credited with launching a new horror subgenre: the laptop thriller. "Our desktops contain more secrets than our friends and relatives do," says Gabriadze. "It is the most intimate space for humans now. Films have always tried to go deeper into character, and now we have this revealing tool that helps us to expose human psychology better. We've developed a format that can certainly stretch across genres and breathe new life into the horror genre, without being gimmicky whatsoever." SFX

Unfriended is released on 1 May.

ARCHIE VS PREDATOR

Hunting Season

Team Archie Meets Team Predator

AFTER TAKING ON THE UNDEAD IN *Afterlife With Archie*, Archie Andrews will be taking on an even more formidable foe in April's *Archie Vs Predator*. Co-published by Dark Horse and Archie Comics, the four-issue miniseries will, according to writer Alex De Campi, not actually emulate the Archie Horrorverse's darker, more noirish tone.

"I refer to it as the 'Archie Splatterverse', where there's more comedy, and more gore," says De Campi. "Teen drama and comedy is one of my favourite things to write, and everyone loves a good teen slasher, don't they? The gig was like, 'Let's put all the awesome things in a box and hit puree!'"

With De Campi drawing on the first *Predator* film for "the rules of the franchise", Archie and friends cross paths with the alien hunter after Jughead wins a crisp packet competition for a spring break in Costa Rica. "The tour guide says 'don't go into the jungle!' But, of course, what happens when you tell a teenager not to do something?" teases De Campi.

Apart from Archie himself, expect appearances from many other regular characters including Kevin Keller and Sabrina. "She has one of the most delightful and crazy subplots in the whole book," says De Campi. "And I'm having so much fun with Betty and Veronica, with the rivalry and the snark."

De Campi is also full of praise for artist Fernando Ruiz. "He's tweaked his style to be a bit more in the old EC Comics/Warren tradition," she says. "When bad things happen – and they do, a lot – Fernando really brings the horror!" SFX

Archie Vs Predator is published on 15 April.

STAR TURN

Will Forte

It's the end of the world as we know it for *The Last Man On Earth* star

APOCALYPTIC INSPIRATIONS

"There are a bunch of very obvious [inspirations] that you will think of from the get-go: *Omega Man* and *I Am Legend*, *28 Days Later*; the first part when he's walking around the empty streets. But one of the big things to me was my fascination with that show *Life After People*. I loved that show."

FUTURE SHOCK

"We pitched the show with the general outline of the whole first season already pretty well thought out, and we certainly had to buckle down and figure out a lot of intricacies and pain in the butt stuff, but the big, bold strokes of the season were already formed. Pretty much every episode ends with a twist, or a cliffhanger, or a new development, so it's pretty fun."

THE ENDLESS TICKING CLOCK

"I think I would go insane pretty quickly. Actually, I might last a little while because I get a hyper focus going, so I would probably get into some weird computer game that would take my mind off stuff for a while. But inevitably that would wear off and I would go crazy pretty quickly. I'm starting from a place of near craziness anyway, so it's debatable that I'm not already there in a land with people."

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

"I'm used to the experience at *Saturday Night Live*, where I was an absurd character all the time. But I don't know that people ever really got to know who the heck I was. I was just the dude in these huge, thick moustaches every week. This is a chance to play a character [Phil Miller] that's a little closer to who I am in real life. In a lot of ways, this is a combination of [my] *SNL* craziness side and the *Nebraska* slightly more subdued side."

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

"A lot of the things that I would do are things that I actually do in the first couple of episodes, a lot of wish fulfilment stuff. It doesn't take much to make me happy, so if you give me a steamroller and some breakables I'm pretty good... or a flame thrower."

The Last Man On Earth airs on Fox in the US.

SCI-FACT!
Crimson Peak co-writer Matthew Robbins did uncredited script work on *Close Encounters*.

RELEASE DATE
16 OCT 2015

FREEZE FRAME

THIS MONTH: we check into **Crimson Peak** with the first trailer for Guillermo del Toro's star-studded gothic ghost story

Mia Wasikowska plays Edith Cushing – the name a clear nod to the iconic horror actor.

Tom Hiddleston's tall dark stranger Sir Thomas Sharpe woos Edith at the ball...

...and invites her to live with him and his sister at gorgeous gothic mansion Allerdale Hall.

Lady Lucille Sharpe (Jessica Chastain) gives Edith something of a frosty reception...

...because Lucille's only a flippin' piano-playing ghost!

Edith goes exploring. She'd be wise to stay out of the nursery in the attic though.

Del Toro may be working with a low budget compared to *Pacific Rim*, but he's really flexing those creative muscles.

Edith mourns at a funeral – clearly she's lost someone close. Could it be her father, Carter (*Supernatural*'s Jim Beaver)?

Ghostly apparitions need a good soak too, you know.

Especially before a rampage. Could this be del Toro's creepiest creature yet?

Charlie Hunnam plays Dr Alan McMichael – Edith's friend – seen here in front of an elaborate Cushing grave.

It's only a dream. It's only a dream. Er, right?

THE BUZZ

RICH

Guillermo's incapable of making an uninteresting movie anyway, but the gothic horror showcased here looks *so* far up his street that this has got to be a must-see.

IAN

If I was a goth this would have probably made me faint with joy. Obviously a compendium of del Toro's fascinations; I suspect the production design will be the real star – it looks ravishing.

NICK

I'm partial to a good gothic romp and I love del Toro when he's at his most lyrical – hello, *Pan's Labyrinth* – but there's just a touch of Tim Burton doing *The Haunted Mansion* here...

SARAH DOBBS

Is del Toro even capable of making a film that isn't beautiful? Everything about this looks stunning. I would move into that mansion right now – butterflies, creepy dolls, ghosts and all.

JORDAN

I love everything del Toro has made (even *Mimic*) and visually this looks sumptuous, but the plot seems worryingly flimsy and this trailer appears to give too much away. Consider me cautiously excited.

In association with
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movie inspired clothing

A touch of *Assault On Precinct 13* going on here?

LET US PREY

Judgement Day

Liam Cunningham plays a character by the name of Six.

Liam Cunningham rains retribution on a psycho-filled precinct

GETTING TO SHOOT IN ROGER Corman's old Irish studio in Spiddal was a real treat for first-time director Brian O'Malley, even if they did almost burn it down. "About 80% of the inferno you see onscreen was real," he explains of the climactic scenes. "It was intensely terrifying, but gave a much better result."

Let Us Prey is a brooding gothic horror with the sensibilities of a classic Western that pits Pollyanna McIntosh's Rachel against an antagonistic collection of cops and criminals. Set in a rural Scottish town, the imposing Six (*Game Of Thrones*' Liam Cunningham) is locked up in the cells of a police station where Rachel is spending a rough first night in her new job. As well as facing a hostile boss (Douglas Russell) and some bitchy co-workers, she begins to suspect that there is judgement operating above the law; something far more powerful than she can initially comprehend.

A modern hybrid of *Twilight Zone*-style morality tale and supernatural siege movie, *Let Us Prey* aims to create the aesthetic of an old-school favourite. "We shot on '80s anamorphic lenses to create the texture you might find in a classic Carpenter feature," O'Malley explains. "We want the film to be somewhat timeless. To further accentuate this, there is also a mixture of costumes and technology that blurs the exact date in which the film is set."

Cunningham was particularly excited to be facing off against McIntosh, "There aren't too many strong female leads apart from Ripley in *Alien*," he said. McIntosh, meanwhile, relishes her new role as an action hero: "Who doesn't want to put on a cop uniform and kick ass?" SFX

Let Us Prey opens on 24 April.

AERIAL ASSAULT

SF TV ROUND UP

SHOWRUNNING

- CBBC's **WOLFBLOOD** (above) renewed for a 12-episode fourth series.
- **SLEEPY HOLLOW** will return for season three. Exec producer Clifton Campbell announced as new showrunner.
- Syfy's **12 MONKEYS** returning, with writers Terry Matalas and Travis Fickett stepping up as showrunners.
- But retro space drama **ASCENSION** has been cancelled, also at Syfy.
- **INTRUDERS** also axed after just one series of the BBC America/BBC Two co-production.
- **AMERICAN HORROR STORY** season five subtitled *Hotel*. Lady Gaga (yep, Lady Gaga) has joined the cast.

CASTING CALL

- In the least surprising news of the month Michelle Gomez confirmed to return as Missy in **DOCTOR WHO**.
- Kieran Brew and William Hurt sign on for ITV's **BEOWULF**. Brew will play the king-to-be while Hurt is Hrothgar.

Continued on p19.

DON'T QUOTE ME

"If you, as a 'serious' filmmaker, think you put more love into your characters than the Russo Brothers do Captain America, or Joss Whedon does the Hulk, or I do a talking raccoon, you are simply mistaken"

Think superhero scribes don't take things seriously? James Gunn has a few words for you.

SCI-FACT!
A free mobile game inspired by *Let Us Prey* is available on the App Store now. It's well hard.

NEW AUTHOR

Taran Matharu

The NaNoWriMo novel writer destined to become a best-seller

Taran's book concerns the importance of loyalty, trust and friendship.

WHAT WOULD YOU WRITE AS *SUMMONER: THE NOVICE*'S COVER BLURB?

Fletcher is just an orphan training as a blacksmith's apprentice when he discovers he has the rare ability to summon demons from another world. Chased from his village for a crime he did not commit, Fletcher travels with his demon to the Vocans Academy, where the gifted few are taught the lost art of summoning.

HOW LONG DID YOU WORK ON IT?

I wrote the first half in one month, taking part in a novel writing challenge known as National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), where the writer must complete 50,000 words in November. The second half of the book was written during the following few months, most of it while in the back of a bus as I backpacked in the Australian Outback.

HOW DID YOU BUILD THE WORLD OF SUMMONER: THE NOVICE?

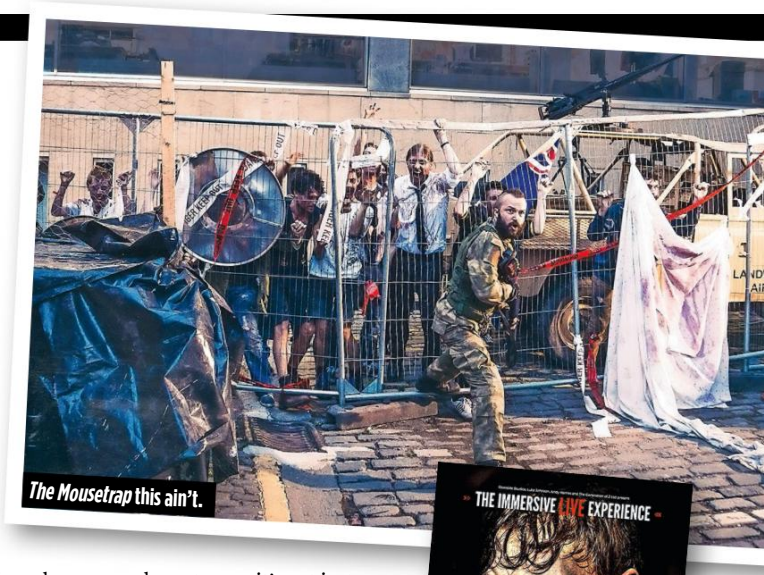
I took inspiration from my own experiences as a teenager, history, mythology and my favourite elements from the fantasy books, films and videogames that I loved. It was a world that I had been hunting for on the shelves of dusty bookstores, but could never find. In the end, I had to create it myself!

WHICH SF/FANTASY AUTHORS WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE COMPARED TO IN A DREAM REVIEW?

So many authors have inspired me to write: Darren Shan, Ursula le Guin, Phillip Pullman, Terry Pratchett, Eoin Colfer, JRR Tolkien... To be compared to any of them would be a dream come true.

Summoner: The Novice is published on Thursday 7 May by Hodder Children's Books.

SCI-FACT!
One other Douglas Adams *Doctor Who* story is still awaiting novelisation: *The Pirate Planet*.



GENERATION OF Z

Zombie Nation

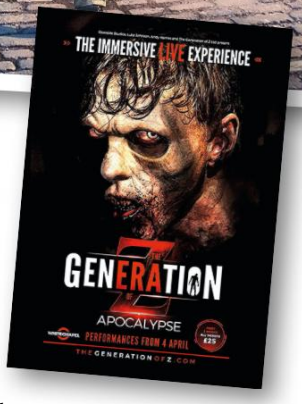
Undead stage show invades East End

WHILE YOU CAN anticipate "having the crap scared out of you", Kiwi theatre group Generation Of Z's upcoming London season will also boast some unexpected qualities. Along with "some freaky, borderline stuff", the immersive zombie show will have just as much heart as it will blood and guts.

"We've really focused on making sure that you care about what's going on," producer Charlie McDermott tells Red Alert. "We want to force people to make some true moral decisions. What we've managed to do is to have these choices that all have alternate outcomes. The actors know both sides that it can go in, so it allows the audience to affect what's happening in an elegant, non-forced way because it's rooted in the story."

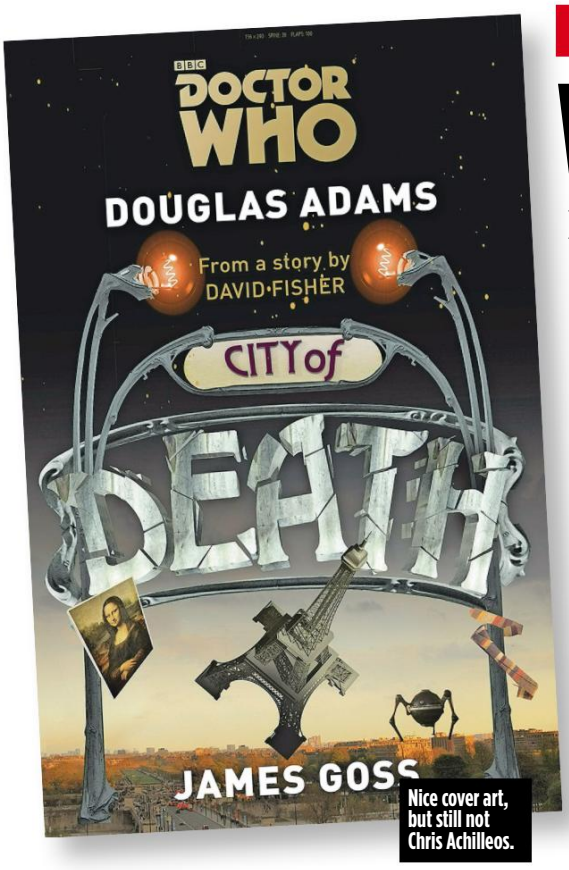
With society collapsing after the deadly Z virus turns vast swathes of the populace into rabid, undead hordes, *Generation Of Z: Apocalypse* will feature four storylines and two separate casts, meaning that it is twice as complex as the production that sold out at last year's Edinburgh Fringe. Staged at a former department store in Whitechapel, it will feature special effects from Pinewood-based Bloody Stuff and prosthetics from Kristyan Mallet, who worked on *Guardians Of The Galaxy* and *Harry Potter*.

"We've had a zombie redesign, which was cool," laughs McDermott, who praises *The Walking Dead* for "making you care about the characters so it's not just watched by horror fans."



However, he reveals that *Generation Of Z* is actually more influenced by zombie survival game *The Last Of Us*. "What we're trying to do is to put people inside the game or the movie," he says. "We're fanboys, so what we're trying to do is make something that we like. I love the genre but now that I'm working in it, I think, 'How can we hone this even further?'" SFX

Generation Of Z: Apocalypse previews from 4 April and opens on 22 April.



Nice cover art, but still not Chris Achilleos.

CITY OF DEATH

We'll Finally Have Paris

Douglas Adams *Who* story is novelised at last

Unless you're well-versed in the minutiae of *Doctor Who* production, the release of *City Of Death* may leave you baffled. Why has it taken 36 years for this novelisation to come out and why are there three authors listed on the cover?

"I know," says one of them, James Goss. "When they offered it to me I went, 'Is there enough space on the cover for the title?'"

The answer is explained by another of the listed authors – Douglas Adams. In the late '70s Adams was script editor of *Doctor Who*. One of the scripts he worked on, "A Gamble With Time" by David Fisher, he rewrote in a weekend. The result was "City Of Death" a tale of a hoax Mona Lisa, a one-eyed alien and time travel set in Paris.

But Adams was too busy to novelise it, and never granted the rights for somebody else to adapt any of his *Who* stories. Such legal hurdles were finally overcome in 2012 when Gareth Roberts's novelisation of Adams's "Shada" was published. "City Of Death" was the next obvious step, but Roberts pulled an Adams and pleaded, "Too busy."

In steps James Goss. "But if you're third choice after Douglas Adams and Gareth Roberts, you're not doing too badly," he reasons pragmatically.

For research, he had access to David Fisher's original "extensive" plot outline and Douglas Adams's original rehearsal script: "Adams's stage directions are great – I've tried to preserve as many of them as possible because they are very, very funny. You think, 'Why should I describe how the Countess falls to the floor when Douglas Adams has written an entire description of it? I'll just steal that.' That's what people are really buying the book for – as much Douglas Adams and as little of me as possible."

He has added a few embellishments of his own, such as an opening chapter that's "more a pastiche of *The Da Vinci Code*" and a few Easter Eggs for New *Who* fans to pick up on.

"I hope people stop trying to work out what all the other different versions of it are and just go, 'This is a *Doctor Who* book with dialogue by Douglas Adams and not too much else in the way.'" SFX

City Of Death is released by BBC Books on 21 May.

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AFTERLIFE #102

Annette O'Toole

Martha Kent in *Smallville*

HAVING PLAYED CLARK KENT'S teenage love interest Lana Lang in 1983's *Superman III* it wouldn't have crossed veteran actress Annette O'Toole's mind that almost two decades later she'd be portraying his adopted mother Martha in Supes coming of age TV series *Smallville*. We spoke to O'Toole about being maternal to the man in blue.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY MARTHA KENT AGAIN?

No, after doing it for six years straight and then a few episodes I feel like I've kind of covered it.

WHAT'S THE STRANGEST REQUEST YOU'VE HAD FROM A FAN?

I guess a lip print but that's not even strange. I don't get strange requests usually.

WOULD ANY OF MARTHA'S SKILLS OR ATTRIBUTES BE USEFUL IN REAL LIFE?

I like the way in *Smallville* Martha Kent was a daughter of a lawyer and was going to be a lawyer herself and that after Jonathan's death she starts going back into politics because Clark is growing up and she knows he doesn't need her so she starts pursuing that.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU THINK WAS UNFINISHED ABOUT MARTHA'S STORY?

I felt there were things that were unexplored about her throughout. But I understand why we didn't go there because it became a show much more about the kids – that was the audience for it and that was a much more interesting story for them than Martha Kent, so I totally get it.

DID YOU GET ANY SOUVENIRS FROM THE SET?

They gave me the back of my director's chair with my name on it in *Smallville*, which they framed and presented to me – that was nice. I've got it out in our little pool house.

IS THERE ANYTHING FROM THE SHOW YOU WISH WAS REAL?

Flying! I would love to be able to fly. We recently took a trip on a catamaran in Hawaii. I stood up at the very front of the boat and leaned forward and I couldn't see anything but water and I felt for the first time that feeling of flying and I thought about *Smallville* and how great that was.

WHAT WOULD IT SAY ON MARTHA'S GRAVESTONE?

She was a good mother.

AERIAL ASSAULT
SF TV ROUND UP

CASTING CALL

- Lucy Lawless and Jill Marie Jones join the cast of **ASH VS EVIL DEAD**.
- Bradley Cooper's *American Sniper* co-star Jake McDorman cast as the lead in the **LIMITLESS** TV show.
- Titty Twister veteran Danny Trejo signs on for **FROM DUSK TILL DAWN** season two.
- *The Fades*' Tom Ellis to play the Prince of Darkness in Fox's **LUCIFER** TV series.
- Former super-folk Dean Cain and Helen Slater to pop up in CBS's **SUPERGIRL**. *Nashville*'s Laura Benanti will also play Kara's birth mum Alura Zor-El.
- **GOTHAM** has found its Lucius Fox. Chris Chalk will play the tech whiz.
- Claudia Black to co-star in epidemic-driven CW drama **CORDON**.
- Sarah Michelle Gellar, lends her voice to **STAR WARS REBELS** season two, alongside husband Freddie Prinze Jr.
- *True Blood*'s Rob Kazinsky will play **FRANKENSTEIN**'s monster for Fox.
- **MINORITY REPORT**'s PreCrime caretaker Daniel London to reprise his role in the TV adap.

© REX (1)

DON'T QUOTE ME

"I still think the satirical idea of a ring filled with rich people hovering above the impoverished Earth is an awesome idea. I almost want to go back and do it correctly"

Maybe Neill Blomkamp should go and remake *Elysium* after *Alien 5*.

SCI-FACT!
Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created the second incarnation of the Shield, Lancelot Strong, in 1959.

RED ALERT

THE SHIELD

Revolutionary Hero

Adam Christopher and Chuck Wendig reinvent Archie's Shield-bearer

FIRST CREATED IN 1940, ARCHIE Comics' the Shield actually predates Captain America by 14 months. Now, courtesy of writers Adam Christopher and Chuck Wendig and artist David Williams, the superpowered patriot is returning as part of the fledgling Dark Circle line in the radically different form of new character Victoria Adams.

"The new Shield has a very different origin story, one going back to the American Revolution," says Christopher. "Over the last 200-or-so years, she's been brought back when America needs her most. This time, though, things are different – something has gone wrong, she doesn't know who she is... and she doesn't know why she is here."

"Making her a woman is vital to our approach," adds Wendig. "Not just to differentiate her from the likes of Cap, but also because really, representation matters. She's a strong female character not just because she's literally strong, but because she's complex, real, flawed, powerful and has agency in her own destiny and the fate of the US."

With Wendig describing it as "a modern spy thriller coupled with superpower shenanigans", the Shield's allegiances will be tested like never before. "Outside the pages, the country is dealing with some cuckoo stuff," he says. "The overreach of the police, racism, surveillance culture... we're going to be cracking all these eggs."

"*The Shield* is a superhero action book, but hopefully a bit more than that too," continues Christopher. "There are conspiracies and dark secrets, some very nasty, insidious evils to fight. The Shield will also punch a giant robot in the face, I'm absolutely 100% committed to making that happen!" SFX

The Shield #1 hits shelves on Wednesday 17 June.

SCI-FACT!
A young Ryan Gosling starred in an episode of the *Goosebumps* TV show.

SPOTLIGHT

RL Stine's beloved horror books get a meta-movie adaptation in *Goosebumps*

"Look, you characters need to listen to me and do as you're told!"

GOOSEBUMPS, WHAT'S THAT THEN?

If you grew up the '90s, this is the world's stupidest question. But for anyone who was playing with *MASK* toys before the fall of the Berlin Wall, *Goosebumps* is RL Stine's astonishingly successful series of kids' horror books with 62 titles clocking up 350 million sales. These unashamedly clean-cut books would usually revolve around the old "new-kid-on-block discovers goings on of both an ooky and kooky variety", and were often fun spins on familiar classics.

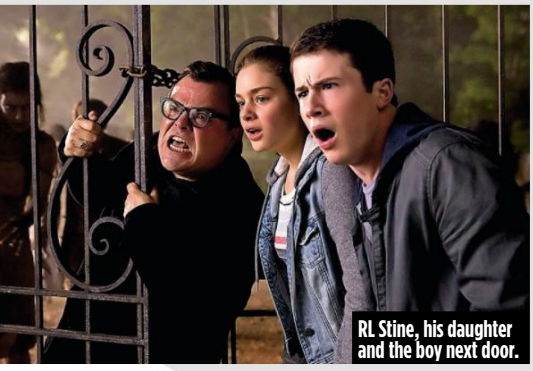
"What do you mean, we're from a tweens horror series?"

META DATA

With 62 titles, you'd think the movie would be spoilt for choice for stories to adapt. Instead, the screenwriters – Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski – have gone down the meta route. Here, RL Stine himself is the lead character, a prisoner of his own imagination as the monsters he creates become real. The author protects his readers – and his teenage daughter – by keeping his ghouls magically locked in his *Goosebumps* books. What could go wrong?

PROBLEM CHILD

Bloody teenagers, coming round here with their raging hormones and curious natures, accidentally unleashing a mysterious author's library-worth of terrible beasties on their small town. Who do they think they are? Dylan Minnette plays Zach, the new-to-the-hood kid that befriends girl-next-door Hannah Stine (Odeya Rush). She captivates him, he lets out her best-selling dad's diabolicals on the pleasant streets of Greenland, Maryland, and together the three of them have to try and wrangle the wrong 'uns back into the manuscripts.


RL Stine, his daughter and the boy next door.

TURN IT BLACK

So who's playing the genial 71-year-old author? Well, it's safe to say they haven't gone for precise casting, with Jack Black lined up to give some high-octane mania. But the actor won the author's blessing to get sinister with the character, creating a more "creepy crawly" movie version of Stine, more likely to be haunted by his monstrous Midas touch than spouting "googedy googedy" vocal improvs.

WHO YA GONNA CALL?

The man charged with corralling Black's energy and the plethora of (both CGI and practical) scary beasts prowling the screen is Rob Letterman, who directed the actor on *Gulliver's Travels*. While that movie was a pretty terrifying experience for viewers, Letterman has genuinely nailed this sort of playful spook-tacular action before as the man behind the animated *Monsters Vs Aliens*. We'll keep all our tentacles crossed on this one.

MONSTER'S BALL

The advantage of the meta route means the movie has all of Stine's huge back catalogue to cherry pick the finest villains from. Which is exactly what they've done. A lot. The citizens of Greenland can expect to have autographs and selfie-requests rudely refused by the likes of the Scarecrow (*The Scarecrow Walks At Midnight*), Murder the Clown (*When The Ghost Dog Howls*), the Mummy (*Curse Of The Mummy's Tomb*) and the Executioner (*A Night In Terror Tower*).

HAPPY SLAPPY

Of course, the *Goosebumps* movie's not-so-Big Bad could only be one angry ventriloquist's dummy. Slappy was carved out of a cursed coffin and his gleeful rudeness quickly turned him into a fan favourite, with the psychotic Pinocchio headlining a number of Stine's books, including the *Night Of The Living Dummy* series. Here the chucklesome Chucky will function as Stine's alter ego, a vessel for the author's meanness made flesh – or at least timber – and will play ringleader to rest of the carnage: one nasty piece of woodwork.

WHEN'S IT OUT?

Goosebumps will prick up your skin on 5 February 2016. SFX

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WHERE MONSTERS DWELL

Aces High

Garth Ennis flies the skies in *Where Monsters Dwell*

THIS MAY GARTH ENNIS RETURNS to Marvel Comics but he won't be prowling the mean streets with the Punisher again. Instead he's pitting intrepid World War One fighter ace Karl Kaufman, aka Phantom Eagle, against a host of prehistoric menaces in the five-issue miniseries *Where Monsters Dwell*. It's going to be "an action-packed adventure with a wry – sometimes quite grim – sense of humour," according to Ennis. "It was actually editor Nick Lowe's idea, he pitched it to me over a pint around October of last year. I thought it would be a good laugh; a chance to do something a bit lighter after some of the rather more grim stories I've been writing lately."

Ennis has history with Kaufman from his 2008 miniseries *War Is Hell*. This time the high-flying hero is giving a lift to socialite Clementine Franklin-Cox when they are transported from the 1920s to a land of dinosaurs and danger. "Clemmie is something of a mystery at first," says Ennis. "Kaufman quickly realises that she knows things she couldn't possibly know. If the story has a serious side it would be through some of the commentary Clemmie provides on the role of women in society at the time."

Overgrown, ravenous lizards aren't the only threat to the duo. Ennis says they'll face "cannibalistic pygmies and a tribe of statuesque – if rather unusual – Amazons. All the stuff you want in a jungle dinosaur story, really. And Kaufman has an unfortunate tendency towards self-sabotage that I find quite amusing." SFX

***Where Monsters Dwell* issue one is on sale from 27 May.**

THE DEAD LANDS

Westward Ho!

How an epic historical story inspired Benjamin Percy's new novel...

IT'S NOT NECESSARY TO BE FAMILIAR with the 1804 Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific to read *The Dead Lands*, but it helps. That's because this journey of discovery into then uncharted territory – "equivalent to blasting off to some far corner of the galaxy now" – was on the mind of writer Benjamin Percy when he wrote his new novel.

"I grew up in their shadow, in Oregon, and initially thought I might pursue a nonfiction project in which I would recreate their expedition," Percy says. "Then my wife asked, 'How long is that going to take exactly?' In the interest of being a better husband and father, I decided to make some stuff up instead."

But while Percy may have looked back in American history for his inspiration, *The Dead Lands* is set in a future USA where "a super flu and nuclear fallout have made a husk of our world". A few survivors cling on in "a walled-in St Louis, known as The Sanctuary". Then, a mysterious visitor appears, who will forever change the fate of (note the names) Lewis Meriwether and Mina Clark.

Given the buzz around *The Dead Lands* it's a huge step up in profile even for someone whose last novel, *Red Moon*, is being adapted by Fox as a series – so is Percy daunted or excited? Both, especially since his "hero" Stephen King emailed and "generously offered up some words of support".

Suddenly, the book's publication seemed all too real. "Once I confirmed that it wasn't one of my friends pranking me, I had to go for a five-mile run," he says, "because my whole body felt run through with electricity, double-volted with excitement and fear." SFX

***The Dead Lands* will be published on 9 April and is reviewed on page 108. For our full interview, visit http://bit.ly/DeadLandsInterview.**

IMAGE BANK

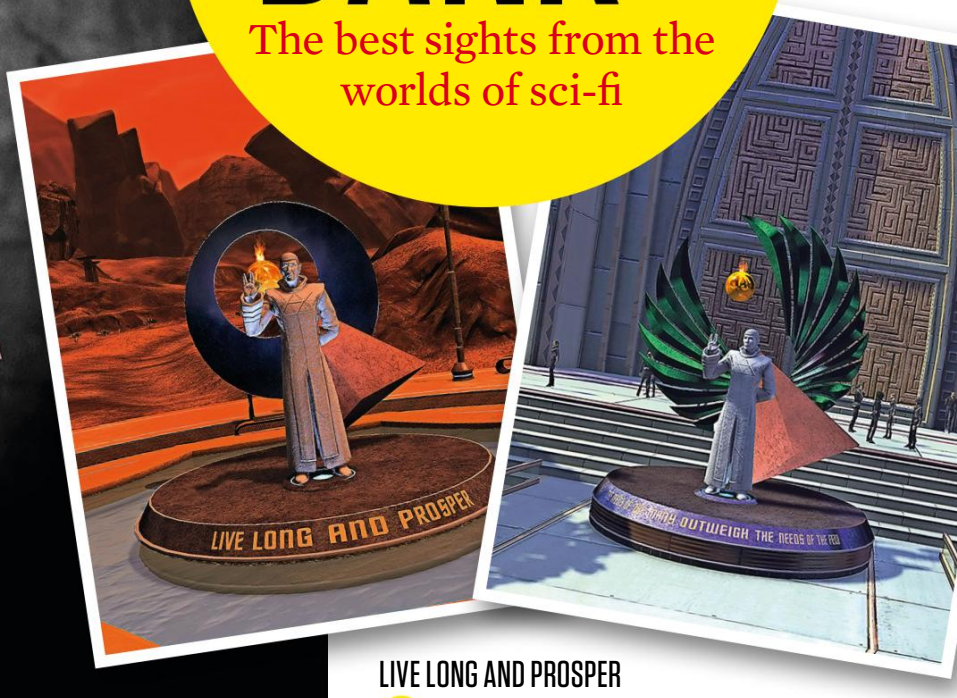
The best sights from the worlds of sci-fi

GHOST BUSTERS

1 The *Insidious* films have quietly become one of the most successful horror series in recent memory, so you won't be surprised to learn that a third film, *Insidious: Chapter 3*, is due on screens from 5 June. Here's an exclusive new image featuring paranormal investigator Elise Rainier, who's either contacting some nefarious spirit or having a quick kip. *Chapter 3* is a prequel, which sees Rainier using her psychic abilities to assist another family targeted by the undead, and marks the feature-directing debut of writer Leigh Whannell. Watch out for more next month.

BLONDE AMBITION

2 The pilot episode of CBS's new *Supergirl* show recently finished filming, and with it came our first glimpse of Melissa Benoist in costume as Kara Zor-El. The super suit was designed by Oscar winner Colleen Atwood, who also created the costumes on *Arrow* and *The Flash*, and fits the gloomier aesthetic of DC's small screen universe. Goodbye primary colours, hello trendy skirt and kick-ass thigh-high boots. We can't wait.



LIVE LONG AND PROSPER

3 The death of Leonard Nimoy saw an outpouring of tributes online, but some die-hard fans went one step further and made the pilgrimage to Vulcan to pay their respects. In *Star Trek Online*, that is. To mark Nimoy's passing the game's developers Cryptic Studios have erected two digital statues in Nimoy's honour – one on Vulcan and one on New Romulus, along with a plaque displaying the names of deceased *Trek* icons. Turn to page 46 for our own tribute to the legendary Leonard Nimoy.

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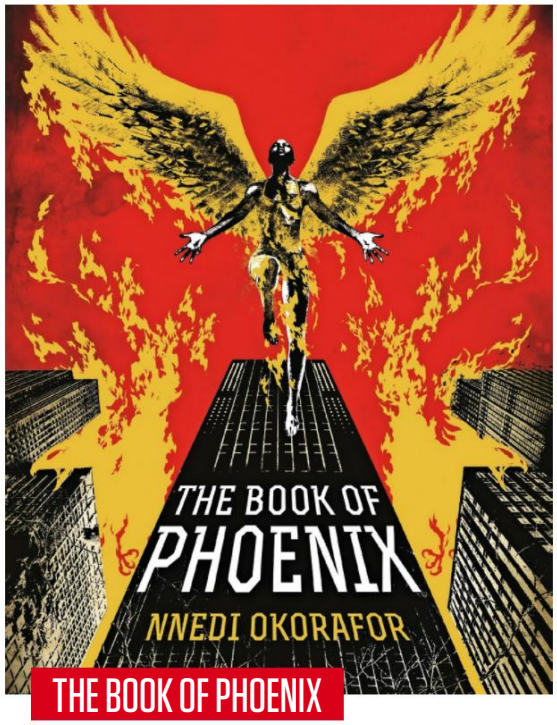

THE BOOK OF PHOENIX

St Anger

Nnedi Okorafor's jail visit inspired her new novel

ON THE NIGHT IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT HER book *Who Fears Death*, a post-apocalyptic tale set in Sudan, had taken the 2011 World Fantasy Award for Best Novel, Nnedi Okorafor wasn't at the ceremony. "I was visiting one of my students in Chicago's Cook County Jail after he'd done something very stupid," recalls the writer and academic. "That evening, I saw with my own eyes the phenomenon I had known for a long time – all those young black men rotting behind bars."

The stories that Okorafor had been working on found a new focus and her new novel, *Who Fears Death* prequel *The Book Of Phoenix*, began to coalesce. In part, the novel is the story behind "The Great Book", "a corrupted religious text" that features in *Who Fears Death*.

It also takes in further topics: the way tales twist and change as they're passed down the years by word of mouth; genetic engineering ("I started writing about a man who could walk through walls and another who could eat glass, and I realised that these magical properties were created by science"); and a Manhattan jail, Tower 7. "After [visiting my student], I started really seeing what Tower 7 was," says Okorafor.

***The Book Of Phoenix* is published on 7 May.**

NEWS WARP
ALL FACT, NO FILLER

- David Hasselhoff to battle with nature's deadliest predator in **SHARKNADO 3: OH HELL NO!**.
- RIP legendary **STAR TREK** producer Harve Bennett, who died in March at the age of 84.
- Gerry Anderson's final movie, **A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE**, to be completed by son Jamie.
- Paramount and CBS announce plans for a 100-stop **STAR TREK: THE ULTIMATE VOYAGE** concert tour to celebrate *Trek*'s 50th anniversary.
- Movie studio Lionsgate has made a significant investment in **WALKING DEAD** game developer Telltale, and will create hybrid TV/videogame "Super Shows".
- Paul Cornell writing five-part Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth **DOCTOR** comic crossover for Titan.
- Director Joseph Kahn releases dark **POWER/RANGERS** fan film online, starring Katee Sackhoff.
- Secret Cinema announces theatrical **EMPIRE STRIKES BACK** screenings for four months from 4 June.
- Alexandre Desplat will be first person other than John Williams to score a live-action *Star Wars* movie with **ROGUE ONE**.

DON'T QUOTE ME

"The moral is that I should never stop playing Wolverine... I've got to find a way to keep playing him until I die"

If Hugh Jackman plays Logan for life we've got *Birdman* to thank.

SCI-FACT!
Star Wars canon is getting its first gay character – Imperial official Moff Mors in upcoming novel *Lords Of The Sith*.

STAR WATCH

Star Wars Standalone I has a title – and Episode VIII has a new release date

THE FIRST STANDALONE *STAR Wars* movie – due in December 2016 and directed by *Godzilla*'s Gareth Edwards – finally has a title: *Rogue One*. No official plot info yet, but we do know it's based on a story idea from ILM effects supremo and producer John Knoll. Logic would suggest it's about a Rebel Alliance pilot, which may dash rumours it'll be a Yoda, Boba Fett or Han Solo origin story. *The Theory Of Everything* star Felicity Jones is confirmed for a starring role. Could she be the eponymous spaceship jockey?

Disney CEO Bob Iger used the shareholder meeting where he made the big reveal to also confirm news we thought we already knew – *Looper* director Rian Johnson will helm and write *Episode VIII*. The big news, however, is that the movie's release date will be 26 May 2017 – 40 years and a day after the release of the original. That means we'll be getting three new *Star Wars* movies in less than 18 months.

Over on *The Force Awakens*, it turns out key intel will be out in the open well before the movie hits cinemas – and we're not talking about scurrilous gossip. *Entertainment Weekly* reports that Lucasfilm Press and Disney Publishing Worldwide will, this autumn, publish at least 20 books and comics set in the 32 years between *Return Of The Jedi* and the new movie. Known as "Journey To Star Wars: The Force Awakens", the fleet of books plays a key role in rewriting the history of the Expanded Universe.

Pulling everything together has been a major mission, involving numerous writers and the Lucasfilm Story Group – the braintrust charged with maintaining the revised canon. "*The Force Awakens* is an extraordinarily heavily guarded storyline. To track it, a lot of top-secret meetings were happening," explained Andrew Sugerman, executive vice president of Disney Publishing Worldwide. "[We] had to be true to the sanctity of the film while making sure that we find these moments to introduce hints, clues, and puzzle pieces." SFX

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ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL CEMMICK

NICK SETCHFIELD'S

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future

RIPLEY YARN!

ALIEN 5

Neill Blomkamp is keeping the finer details of his *Alien* sequel as close as a facehugger but he's prepared to trail some tantalising hints. "I want this film to feel like it is literally the genetic sibling of *Aliens*," he tells Sky Movies. "So it's *Alien*, *Aliens* and then this movie." Not that he necessarily wants to wipe the third and fourth chapters from existence. "My favourites are the first two movies, so I want to make a film that's connected to *Alien* and *Aliens*," he tells Allocine. "I'm not trying to undo *Alien 3* and *Alien Resurrection*. I just want it to be connected to *Alien 1* and *2*." Franchise icon **Sigourney Weaver** is looking forward to some xenomorph-battling closure. "I would love to take Ripley out of orbiting around in space and give a proper finish to what was such an excellent story," she says. "I can't think of a better director. He's a real fan. I think he'll be true to the world and take it in unexpected directions. It's got a lot of sinew in it. It will certainly stand up to the others and probably break a lot of new ground as well." *Alien 5* bursts from the chest of cinema itself sometime in 2017.

BUZZING!

TOY STORY 4

So just where do you go once you've been to infinity and beyond? Maybe it's time to point your jetpack at Planet Rom-Com... Pixar president **Jim Morris** reveals that the next adventure of the mismatched toybox ensemble will shift the franchise in an unexpected new direction. "The third movie ended in a beautiful way and completed a trilogy," he tells *Disney Latino*. "I think this movie is not part of this trilogy. It is a separate story... It will be a love story. It will be a romantic comedy. It will not put much focus on the interaction between the characters and children." **Josh Coley** has just joined the project as **John Lasseter**'s co-director, working from a screenplay by *Celeste And Jesse Forever* writers **Rashida Jones** and **Will McCormack**.

STACKING THE DECKARD!

BLADE RUNNER 2

Harrison Ford's revisiting another of his iconic roles. And no, it's not "Bellhop" from 1966's *Dead Heat On A Merry-Go-Round*, still criminally sequel-free. After months of intense will-he-won't-he action he's now officially signed to reprise trenchcoat-clad

BUSTING OUT!

GHOSTBUSTERS

Who ya gonna call? No, seriously, who ya gonna call? The *Ghostbusters* brand appears to be swelling to the size of a marauding Stay Puft man. We already know about **Paul Feig**'s female-driven reboot, arriving in the summer of 2016. Now comes word of another franchise extension, this one directed by *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*'s **Anthony** and **Joe Russo** and tipped to star **Channing Tatum** and **Chris Pratt** (possibly on the assumption that every role in Hollywood is linked to Chris Pratt on a fundamental quantum level). But wait! There's more! These movies would be followed by a third film, teaming both casts. And then! A fourth film! That one would be a prequel, naturally. The imminent Ghostbusterisation of reality is all down to Sony forming Ghostcorps, a new production company run by original creatives **Ivan Reitman** and **Dan Aykroyd** with the aim of creating an annual series of films. Trust us: it's time to buy shares in proton packs.

Replicant chaser Rick Deckard, joining Han Solo in the Hell Freezes Over sub-set of his screen career. Original helmer **Ridley Scott** has passed on the chance to direct this belated sequel though he's still onboard as producer. Ford will return to a dystopian, neon-drenched Los Angeles under the direction of **Denis Villeneuve**, best known for crime drama *Prisoners* and doppelganger tale *Enemy*. Fellow producers **Andrew Kosove** and **Broderick Johnson** call it "a uniquely potent and faithful sequel to one of the most universally celebrated films of all time." Origami unicorn, anyone?

SLUUURRRRP!

THE BLOB

The 1958 original was one of the classics of drive-in cinema (read our review on page 106), the tale of a relentless mass of gelatinous ooze crushing a small American town – rumours insist this unstoppable horror went on to present Hollywood showbiz slots on breakfast TV. Now *Con Air* and *Expendables 2* helmer **Simon West** is bringing us an altogether less wobbly remake. "It's going to be much more sci-fi than the original," he tells *Screen Relish*. "It's a bigger scale type of movie. It's more *Alien* meets *Predator* and designing the creature is a long and involved process because it's very sophisticated. It's not going to be the goo pouring through windows..." Pity. We were ready for that jelly. Filming begins in August with *Seven*'s **Richard Saperstein** and *Silent Night*'s **Brian Witten** producing.

LEND US YOUR EARS!

DUMBO

You've seen a horse fly. You've seen a dragon fly. You've seen a house fly. But have you seen an elephant fly... from the head of **Tim Burton**? Yes, straight from the boggling but true file: everyone's favourite schock-haired auteur is set to remake Disney's 1941 animated classic. It's the latest live-action take on a Mouse House mainstay, following the likes of *Maleficent*, *Cinderella* and Burton's own 2010 version of *Alice In Wonderland*. For those of you raised in an underground bunker with no Christmas television in your childhoods it's the story of a baby circus elephant teased for his outsized ears before discovering the power of flight and triumphing over adversity probably. Listen, **Johnny Depp** could totally nail it. *Transformers* franchise scribe Ehren Kruger pens the screenplay.

BE UNKIND, REWIND!

RINGS

Let's add this one to the pile marked Prequels You Never Knew You Needed, right next to *The Omen: Satan's Feeling Frisky Tonight* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Running With Scissors Years*. Yes, the next instalment of Paramount's *Ring* franchise will loop back to events preceding the 2002 Naomi Watts movie – itself a remake of Japan's 1998 horror classic *Ringu* – revealing exactly how that bedevilled VHS tape was created and delving even further into the origins of telly-crawling spookette Samara. Well, it was either go back in time to the videocassette age or try and thrash out a story about a cursed Netflix binge. *Before The Fall*'s **F Javier Gutierrez** directs from a screenplay by **Akiva Goldsman**, **Jacob Aaron Estes** and **David Loucka**. Casting is now underway.

ALSO BURNING

JESSICA CHASTAIN joining **CHRIS HEMSWORTH** in *The Huntsman*, prequel to 2012's *Snow White And The Huntsman*... **SCOTT RUDIN** producing an adaptation of **KAZUO ISHIGURO**'s *The Buried Giant*... *Tron 3* rumoured to film in Vancouver from October... *Divergent*'s **EVAN DAUGHERTY** writing latest draft of the *Tomb Raider* reboot... **MATT DAMON** and **WILLEM DAFOE** joining **ZHANG YIMOU**'s historical fantasy epic *The Great Wall*... **DREW GODDARD** hotly tipped choice to direct new *Spider-Man* movie... Lionsgate adapting steampunk WW2 tale *Dust* with *Dodgeball*'s **RAWSON MARSHALL THURBER** attached to direct... **CHRIS PINE** rumoured for *Green Lantern*... *Jurassic World*'s **COLIN TREVORROW** helming alien contact tale *Intelligent Life*... *Wolverine 3* filming early 2016... MGM remaking *The Secret Of NIMH* in live action... **TS NOWLIN** writing *The Maze Runner 3*... **LUKE EVANS** joining **EMMA WATSON** in Disney's *Beauty And The Beast*... **BRYAN SINGER** directing *Uprising*, adapting **ROBERT A HEINLEIN**'s tale *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress* for Twentieth Century Fox... **LIAM HEMSWORTH** and **JESSIE USHER** joining *Independence Day 2*... Paramount planning to adapt **ALFRED BESTER**'s *The Stars My Destination*... **JACK HUSTON** in the frame for *The Crow*... **KODI SMIT-McPHEE** playing Nightcrawler in *X-Men: Apocalypse*... *Community*'s **ROB SCHRAB** writing *Lego Movie* sequel...

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NEXT MONTH # 261

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Bat Durston Lives

David Langford imagines an SF/Western mashup

- SF writer David Langford has had a column in *SFX* since issue one.
- David has received 29 Hugo Awards throughout his career.
- His celebrated SF newsletter can be found at http://news.ansible.co.uk.
- He is a principal editor of the SF Encyclopedia at http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com.

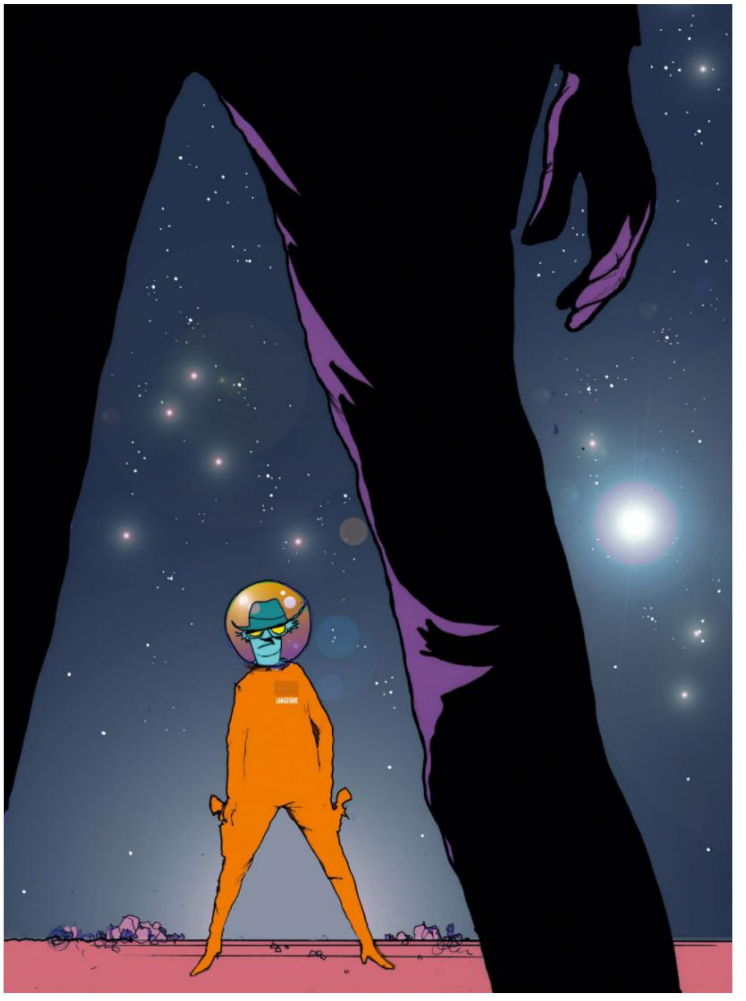


ILLUSTRATION BY ANDY WATT

Not many people remember the original soap operas – never-ending US radio serials, like *The Archers* but relentlessly commercial and called soap opera because sponsors mostly tried to sell you soap. (James Thurber has a long funny survey of the soaps in *The Beast In Me And Other Animals*.) The story quality was low, the cliché count high. Naturally, uninspired hack Westerns were soon dubbed horse operas, and in 1941 Wilson Tucker – himself a nifty SF author – coined the phrase "space opera" for the "hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn, spaceship yarn."

Attitudes change: New Space Opera as written by the late lamented Iain M Banks is ever so highly respected in SF circles. But the Western connection used to be too close for comfort when pulp-magazine authors recycled horse opera as space opera, with six-shot rayguns and radium claim-jumping on the Milky Way's Wild Western frontier:

"Jets blasting, Bat Durston came screeching down through the atmosphere of Bbllzznaj, a tiny planet seven billion light years from Sol. He cut out his super-hyper-drive for the landing... and at that point, a tall, lean spaceman stepped out of the tail assembly, proton gun-blaster in a space-tanned hand.

"'Get back from those controls, Bat Durston,' the tall stranger lipped thinly. 'You don't know it, but this is your last space trip.'"

That's not the real thing but a cunning spoof. From the 1950s, *Galaxy* magazine ran a regular ad with Western and space-opera versions of the same hack story opening (guess which appears above), plus the strident claim YOU'LL NEVER FIND IT IN GALAXY! Never mind the critics who rudely retorted that you *did* occasionally find it in *Galaxy*, and not just in ads.

There are some good SF Westerns, like Bob Shaw's serious "Skirmish On A Summer Morning" or – played for laughs – Poul Anderson's and Gordon Dickson's "The Sheriff Of Canyon Gulch", in which impressionable alien teddy-bears adopt Wild West ways, and Howard Waldrop's "Night Of The Cooters", where a stray Martian invasion cylinder from *The War Of The Worlds* lands in 1890s Texas to bedevil the local sheriff. But mostly it was Bat Durston stuff.

Bat came suddenly to mind, a nasty habit of his, when I read *The New Yorker*'s explanation of how an outright SF novel – *Station Eleven* by Emily St John Mandel – crashed the exclusive "literary fiction" shortlist of the US National Book Awards. It's "set in a familiar genre universe, in which a pandemic has destroyed civilisation. The twist – the thing that makes *Station Eleven* National Book Award material – is that the survivors are artists."

The Western connection used to be too close for comfort

If that's all it takes...

"Bat Durston, have you gone plumb loco?" gritted the spacepoke's raw-boned pardner Lefty, scratching his ear with his snub-nosed, six-chambered neutron depolariser. "What in tarnation you doing there?"

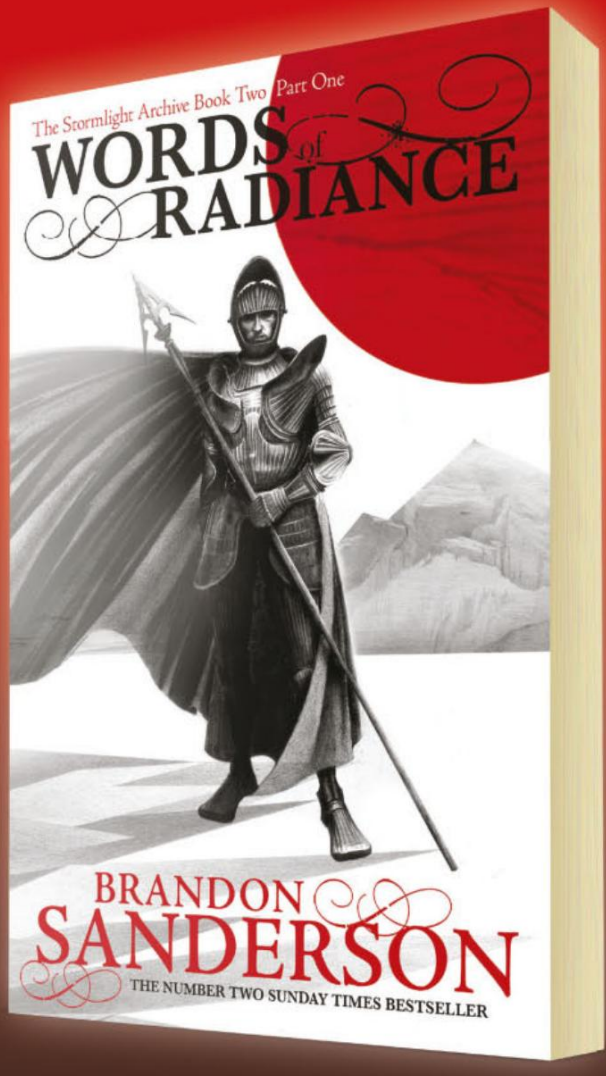
"Reckon I gonna need a mite more gamboge in them thar highlights," drawled Durston lazily, squeezing paint from a space-rations tube onto his big rugged palette. "If art's what them danged National Book Award judges want, art is what they gonna get." Smoke curled from Bat's stogie as, narrow-eyed and grim-jawed, he plied his brush with the speed of a striking sex-crazed strooka. Time ambled by like an ornery space-dogie. Outside, space-tumbleweed rolled across great vacuum-prairies, past the floating mesas of the western asteroid belt.

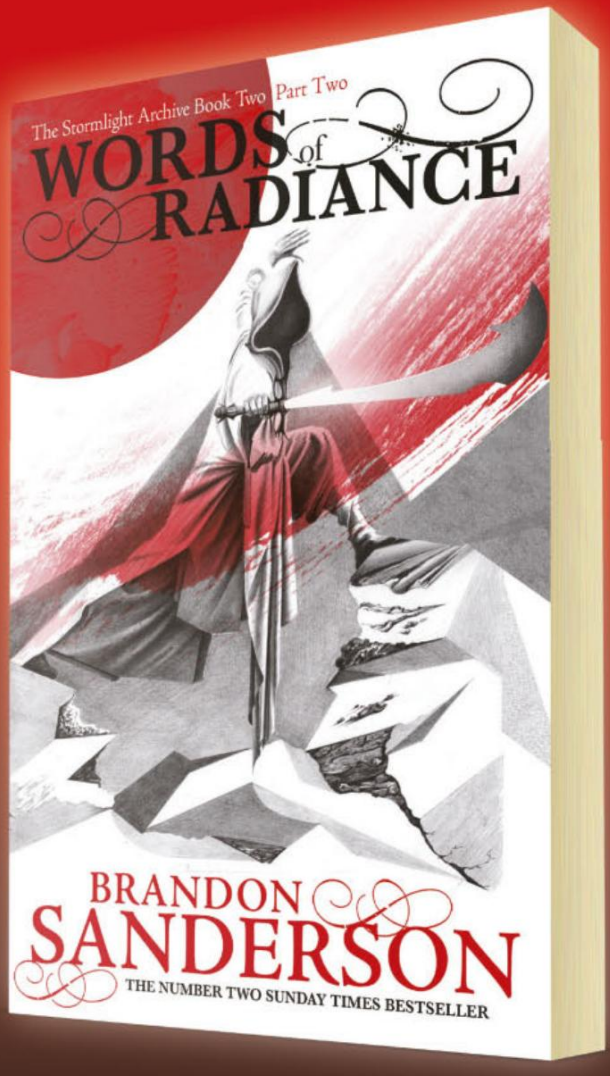
"Shucks," Lefty spat at last, "a five-year-old kid could paint better than that."

Bat grinned a wide, nonrepresentational space-grin. "I'm figgerin' we're not just fixed with the NBA – this is a cinch for the Turner Prize!" SFX

David Langford is spurring his Mustang-class speedster to head off the greenskins at the pass.

ENTER THE WORLD OF THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE





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VG

Losers Rule

Bonnie Burton says hurrah for the misfits and oddballs

- Our columnist Bonnie Burton, a San Francisco-based author, has written a number of books including her latest – *The Star Wars Craft Book*.
- Bonnie appears on the massive "Geek & Sundry" and "Stan Lee's World Of Heroes" YouTube channels.
- More of her writing can be found at www.grrl.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY MARIA COLINO

There's nothing more exciting to watch than misfit antiheroes and underdogs claiming victory against the bad guys of the universe. Whether you root for Groot, Rocket Raccoon and the rest of the rag-tag crew in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, or believe in a kid on a moisture farm who just wants to find adventure and help out a princess, the outsiders will always be the coolest kids in SF.

Perhaps we adore oddballs the most because they mirror our own history of being considered the adolescent losers and lone wolves. I can relate to feeling like a misfit on more than one occasion all throughout my long legacy as the last kid picked for anything. I never quite fitted in with all the other self-assured kids who could make friends instantly and master sports without really trying.

I was the kid people looked at with one raised eyebrow. Sure, I may have had imaginary friends longer than most children, and I would talk to public trashcans pretending they were robots. So what? I was a different breed of awesome. I was a creative eccentric trapped in an awkward pre-teen body.

I wore all black to make a statement. I would recite Shakespeare soliloquies in Klingon during high school auditions for *Hamlet*. I wore glow-in-the-dark lipstick for photography lab just so I could freak out classmates while we processed film in the dark room. I'd use a ouija board in the school library to pretend ghosts were my tutors.

So yeah, I can relate to the dissidents that are heralded as beloved sci-fi and fantasy heroes. It's so much more fun to celebrate heroes that have dealt with the same trials and tribulations as we do. It's called the Hero's Journey for a reason.

Harry Potter would never have been the hero we needed if he came from a loving home and got everything he desired from the get-go. He needed to have a horrible childhood, minimal friends and a questionable history for us to really get excited when he stood up to unfair professors, prejudiced wizards and Lord Voldemort himself.

Luke Skywalker would have been downright dull if we'd met him at the Jedi Academy instead of trapped on a moisture farm with his aunt and uncle, fixing broken droids and dreaming of a more exciting existence.

Rocket Raccoon wouldn't have been the warrior he became unless he had to prove he could take on an army at his minute size. Even Groot had to overcome a few issues for being a giant with a limited vocabulary.

There's also heroes who started out exactly like us – goofy geeks with zero game. Spider-Man started out as the science whiz kid before he became the guy who could catch criminals with web from his wrists. Keeping his secret identity intact, he still has to put up with taunting peers, an overbearing newspaper boss and a chaotic love life.

I would talk to trashcans pretending they were robots

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is another great example of what it means to suffer through high school living a double life. I barely survived my high school years just trying to get good grades while making at least one friend so as not to turn into a complete social outcast. I can't imagine doing that *and* saving the world from armies of vampires and demons.

Thankfully all these bizarre heroes exist for us geeks to look up to so we know that we're not alone with our personality quirks and antisocial behaviour. We want to be loved, appreciated and wanted just as much as our strange superheroes.

I can't wait to see what exceptional adventures the next batch of weirdo heroes have in store for us. I hope they continue to inspire me, as well as the next generation of freaks and geeks who could use someone like them to look up to. SFX

Bonnie reckons we have more in common with mutants, Wookiees, aliens, moisture farm kids and riotous raccoons than we thought.

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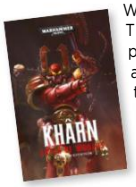
THIS MONTH'S LETTERS COMPILED BY

Alex Cox, Operations Editor

You have all been very vocal this month. And – with the exception of some lovely letters memorialising Leonard Nimoy – quite angry. Perhaps it's because there's so much going on in sci-fi and fantasy at the moment; perhaps it's because, as our Hot Topic proves, there's not quite enough...

WRITE IN AND WIN!



When young Chris Thorpe over there penned his missive about *Spider-Man* to us, little did the Doncaster native know then that in exchange for his labour he would be awarded with a free book by our chums at the Black Library. But perhaps he had a strange feeling... Anyway, Chris wins a copy of *Khârn: Eater Of Worlds* by Anthony Reynolds, which features one of the most iconic figures in the *Warhammer 40,000* setting and tells the story of his transition into a Blood-mad betrayer. Exciting stuff! Write in and get Star Letter and you too could bag a gratis book.

Will Spidey be a blessing or a curse for the MCU?

STAR LETTER

MARVEL TEAM-UP

I felt I should write regarding Marvel's rebooting of the reboot of the *Spider-Man* movies from 2012 – a whole three years ago. Barely. Really, Hollywood? Is that where we are now? It's like that bit in *Futurama* where a show is cancelled in the trailer.

It was good to hear that Marvel had worked out a deal with Sony to get Spidey in Marvel movies – until it was announced that this would mean a (hasty) recasting of the role, and a new movie, with probably a new director. Oh, and that Sinister Six film has been put back (read quietly dropped).

Erm... sorry? That's all easier than writing a scene in a film, say *Avengers 3*, with Spidey in? Or a short scene with Andrew Garfield's Spidey in *Captain America*? It can't be too hard to put him into a Marvel movie. To prove it, I have written a short scene with him in for *Avengers 3*.

Scene: A huge battle in New York. Oh, yeah, they did that. How about Rotherham? Settled.

The Avengers: Are nearly overwhelmed when a figure swings in, quickly taking out several opponents and buying the Avengers some time.

The Avengers: "Where have you been?"

Spider-Man: "It's complicated."

All that ridiculous red tape with Sony dealt with in two words. This feels like Marvel's first cinematic misstep, but it's a big one.

Chris Thorpe, Doncaster

Why are they ditching Andrew Garfield? Well... it's complicated. And possibly something to do with two massive legal teams clonking heads over some very sticky movie rights.

THIS COULD BE YOU! EMAIL SFX@FUTURENET.COM

HOT TOPIC WITH *IN THE FLESH* AND *ATLANTIS*

AXED, WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ALL THE UK SCI-FI/ FANTASY TV?

It's sad that sci-fi TV seems to always get the short end of the stick, but a lot of the time networks set things up to fail by lack of publicity and silly times. It even happens to *Doctor Who*, to a lesser extent – moved about on a Saturday to suit whatever reality junk is shown before/after. Give things a decent set-in-stone time, advertise right, and the viewing figures would improve.

Of course you can say there's iPlayer, but these are shows people want to share and discuss. Moving airing times makes this harder and in these busy times viewers are not as inclined to check a TV guide every week to find when the show they enjoy will air. They'll just give up. It's hard to turn a casual viewer into a die-hard fan this way.

Stacey Shaw, Buntingford

Expensive flops. *Atlantis*. *Demons*. *Outcasts*. *Survivors*. The US-financed series of *Torchwood*. All series which had serious money ploughed into them, but which failed to deliver. And when a genre fails to deliver a sustainable hit over a number of years TV executives begin to consider it risky to commission shows in it.

I'd hope not, but if things continue in the fashion which they currently are it might be a good long while until we see British TV channels taking the risk on a long running sci-fi or fantasy show. At which point we'll probably have to migrate to viewing US TV companies' wares for a while again, until the risky period blows over.

Mark Roberts, email

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Yeah they looked good, but where was all the water?

In The Flesh: late and great.

"Maybe UK sci-fi TV needs a break to come back stronger"

British and sci-fi has never been a happy marriage. Especially in mainstream prime time. Maybe like *Doctor Who* and Ross 'n' Rachel it will need to go on a break and come back stronger.

James Metherell, London

We can't just pin our hopes on reviving past shows/glories. Unfortunately we need a production company and a broadcaster with the courage and conviction to make original sci-fi from fresh blood with new ideas.

Nick Clare, Dudley

Doctor Who gave British TV a much-needed kick up the backside with shows like *Life On Mars*, *Ashes To Ashes*, *Merlin*, *Being Human* and *Atlantis* – plus *Doctor Who* spin-offs *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* – all proving the old "we don't" →

THIS MONTH IN SCI-FI HISTORY

SFX 196 July 2010

5 YEARS AGO

What you probably *can't* read here is "Sex cults and body swapping – p72". It was for Aussie soap *Chances*.

SFX 131 June 2005

10 YEARS AGO

Crotch ahoy! Christian Bale begins to exert his hold on us. And what's that word, top left? Why, it's Superman!

SFX 65 June 2000

15 YEARS AGO

Going through a purple patch, thanks to Seven of Nine, and Mark Gatiss, would you believe, was in Couch Potato.

CA$H IN THE AT-AT

Your sci-fi memorabilia valued by the experts from auctioneers Vectis

David Reid sent us a pic of his Captain Lazer figure from the Major Matt Mason range from the '60s. It still has all its accessories and the lights and sounds still work, although there is some minor play wear to the body.

Kathy Taylor of Vectis says:

Mattel's Major Matt Mason range of toys were produced from 1967–1970. They were 6" tall rubber-like figures with an internal wire armature. Their vehicles and space suits were based on Nasa's original designs and helped inspire a generation of young "wannabe" astronauts.

Captain Lazer was 13" high (more than double the size of the other figures) and introduced in 1968. He is battery-operated, has glowing eyes, a breastplate and laser gun complete with sounds. Made of dark blue metallic hard plastic, it is rumoured that the tooling and scale of this figure was so incongruous with the rest of the diminutive range that it actually was not originally intended to be part of the set. You can see later *Battlestar Galactica* figures (Colonial Warrior and Cylon Centurion) that used the same moulding.

VALUE £40-£70

Mint in box: £300-500. Unboxed, complete: £40-70. Boxed examples are rare – expect to pay a premium price for mint in box examples.

If you've got a piece of memorabilia you'd like us to feature, send us a photo of your item (in focus, well lit against a plain background, and at least 1,000 pixels across) with a few words about what it means to you, to **sfx@futurenet.com**, using the subject line Cash In The AT-AT. Ask The SFXperts will return next month.

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SOAPBOX
SFX WRITERS' PERSONAL RANTS

Operations Editor Alex Cox says it's time to bury zombies for good

Nah, let 'em die!

The zombie epidemic must end now

Alright, that's enough. Pack it in. Put away the ketchup and the funny contact lenses, and stop that pathetic shambling. The zombie epidemic must end now.

This isn't meant to spark a debate about whether zombies should be able to run (they shouldn't) or just wander aimlessly. It's not even a rant about how basically all zombie movies, videogames and even boardgames are exactly the same. My real problem is that zombies are training wheels. They need to be taken away before the entertainment industry will ever learn to ride its bike by itself.

Zombies tick peril off the Big List o' Movie Essentials, and much more besides. They provide relationship drama, shlock thrills, jump scares, slapstick comedy, unlikely redemption. It's all too easy. So why bother to come up with something more original when Groany McLoosebits is risen and ready to help?

Okay, zombies are rarely pitched to the intellectual crowd, and gory excitement is a key ingredient in lunchbox movie-making – it's the unexpected chocolate treat which tempers the drudge of everyday life's value-brand Ready Salted crisps, and it is good. But zombies are too easy a fix, like a multipack of suspect Czech confectionary your mum wants to use up before they go out of date. They seem delicious at first, but when you find a zombie in your lunch every day, get one forced in your mouth whenever you look bored, find one secretly tucked in your pocket so it melts and dribbles down your leg? Enough.

I'm not going to pretend to have seen everything zombie related. And how could I; Wikipedia's probably-not-definitive list of zombie movies thumps in at 413 entries with about three plots amongst them. But perhaps we've already reached peak zombie. 2014's cine-zom output was a mere 11 movies, compared to 17 cinema outings in 2012 and an astonishing 25 in 2009. Maybe the plague is relenting, and new ideas are indeed spilling from bigwig brraaaiiinnnss. At least until the second infection of zombie remakes hits...

GETTY (1)

have the budget to match the Americans" excuse is plain rubbish. It's just a shame that mainstream audiences prefer reality TV and soaps.

Robert William Graham, Facebook

Let's not forget *Orphan Black*. It may be BBC America, but still. It's bloody marvellous...

Mark Ayling, Manchester

It's just the same old fact that British TV channels would rather make crappy reality TV shows than fantasy/sci-fi. Even our one flagship sci-fi show, *Doctor Who*, has been dumbed down to a pale shadow of its original self to accommodate the limited attention span of people who watch TV these days!

Marc Ofner, Kingston Upon Hull

Today's programme makers in the UK wouldn't know how to make an intelligent and challenging sci-fi/fantasy in the vein of *Blake's 7* or original *Doctor Who*. Indeed, Moffat's terrible re-imagined New *Who* is proof of that.

Thomas Davies, Lincoln

The BBC seems to believe that the only people who want to watch sci-fi shows are 12-year-old kids. Maybe if they wrote shows for a 9pm time slot instead of 7pm Saturday.

Mark Causer, Birmingham

Maybe if the makers of these programmes made them a bit less crappy they wouldn't get cancelled.

Paolo Bianco, London

Calm down, you lot. Brit sci-fi will surely rebound, and as many of you point out, we've got a fantastic back catalogue to draw from if we're ever short of ideas. Speaking of which...

Someone needs to get some of the *2000 AD* titles made into shows. *Future Shocks* could be a start. Anyone remember the live-action *Dan Dare* series that was in production? I think 10 minutes were produced before it was scrapped. James Fox was Dan, and Rodney Bewes was Digby. I've seen stills, and it looked amazing.

Noel Wallace, East Kilbride

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The stuff memories are made of.

We're absolutely up for some rejuvenated *2000 AD* and *Eagle* properties – as long as the quality slider is a notch above that of the creepy 2002 *Dan Dare* CG series.

LEONARD NIMOY RIP

It was very sad to hear of Leonard Nimoy's passing. I grew up with classic *Trek* and recently saw his range as the sinister William Bell in *Fringe*. He will be fondly remembered, now he has journeyed to the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns...

Keith Tudor, Romsey

He was wonderful. Always. Whether acting or directing, even in the early days when you could see the string. May he be remembered always. Especially loved *The Voyage Home*.

Jenny Hoskins, Facebook

Spock was my childhood hero, a huge hero that taught me to work hard at school, be tolerant and respectful of others, be curious about the world and how it works, have a thirst for knowledge and a love of science. He was the half-Vulcan half-human I watched every week, and recreated every playtime. I'd spend hours in front of the mirror practising both my eyebrow-raising and my Vulcan salute. Spock is one of the very greatest of sci-fi icons, and in Leonard Nimoy we enjoyed one of the very greatest of acting talents. May he live long and prosper in our memory.

Andy B, email

My favourite Leonard Nimoy thing is the early '80s promo video he did for Magnavox Laserdisc players. Perhaps I'm too ironic for my own good, but it's pure gold.

POWERFUL CURSING

HOLY CRAP. That *Power/Rangers* fan film [http://bit.ly/sfxrangers] could possibly be the greatest update of a programme/film/toy range ever. It's about time that people realise there is an adult market for these types of shows.

"May Nimoy live long and prosper in our memory"

Ooh, aren't they colourful?!

Tell me *Transformers* wouldn't have been a seriously superior film if it was adultafied. They need to make that film.

Mike Garner, Moorends

Now hold on. Explosions, loud noises, and a viewpoint that just can't seem to bring itself to focus on anything? That sounds like a quality adult night out.

IT'S GRIMM

I think that *Grimm* is a welcome reprieve from series that try to reinvent themselves in every new season. Why change a formula that works and that the viewers like? They changed so much in the new series of *Continuum* that it leaves me confused and unable to follow the plot sometimes. In *Grimm* we get to know the characters, one series develops out of the next without changing too much, the arc isn't too complicated or twisted so that you get lost in it. There are still some things which annoy me, like the dodgy use of German by a lot of the characters, and I know that it isn't a very deep show but for the most part it is fun to watch.

Ilona Kosmowsky, email

The irony of *Continuum*'s intentionally irregular continuity cannot be lost on anyone.

Grimm: an example to us all?

WAHF

WE ALSO HEARD FROM

● **Brett Holdaway** (who reckons a rebooted *Blake's 7* would be "just the dystopian drama we need"); ● **Stephen Dunne** (similarly convinced by *Blake's 7*, but only if it's given to "the Americans" along with *Doctor Who* – eww, no); ● **Gary Pratt** (suggesting author Paul Cornell's James Quill character as perfect Saturday night TV fare); ● **Paul Savage** (sick and tired of shows being axed on cliffhangers); ● **Christopher Daniels** (hoping his beloved *UFO* never gets revived); ● **Del Robertson Somerville** (bemoaning *Celebrity Ski Jump* and related schedule-fillers); ● **Neill McCarthy** (arguing that the true programming blip was the time there were loads of genre shows on UKTV – we hope not); ● **Stephen Graves** ("DC is embarrassed by the fact that they're making superhero movies"); ● **Jonathan Mock** (gutted that Chuck Norris isn't lined up for *Independence Day 2* "so he can beard-punch ET"); ● **Steve Jewess** (rightly pointing out that the CG *Thunderbirds* isn't actually meant for those of us that grew up with the wonky puppets); ● **Matt Langley** (pushing for a Lego *Doctor Who* videogame); ● **Terry Westmorland** ("*Elysium* was terrible. *District 9* was horrid... Neill Blomkamp should go make daytime soaps"); ● **John Conway** (praising BBC Radio 4's genre content); ● **Alice Cavender** (disappointed that we didn't include an audio category in our awards – maybe next time, but we'd encourage everyone to write in and tell us their favourite audios nonetheless!); ● **Mark Jeffreys** ("What was all the hype about over *Fortitude*? If it went any slower it would be in danger of going backwards!"); ● **MD Doornkamp** ("You stopped reviewing TV shows because they were beneath you" – not at all; we review TV shows online, so you get bang up to date reviews, and lots of them!)... and many, many more...

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH THE SCI-FI WORLD!
Write in and you'll win some books if we feature you in the star letter slot. Email us at sfx@futurenet.com or you can try Post Apocalypse, *SFX*, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA if you're not taken with technology.

Wishlist

Illustrating what you want to see in new SF films and television. **This Month:** Spider-Man swings into the Marvel Cinematic Universe

Spider-Man

YOUR TOP 5 REQUESTS

No Origin Story

1 By far your biggest request was that the new solo Spidey movie skips the origin story. You could say Uncle Ben's been done to death (arf). "To do it again would be a waste of screen time," says **Regulus VanHelsing** via Facebook.

Miles Mannered

2 Sony and Marvel going with Miles Morales over Peter Parker is something **IJ Bailey** would encourage. "At this point I'd much prefer Miles Morales. I don't think they could realistically merge Peter Parker's story with the story of the Marvel Cinematic Universe at this point."

Bring Back JJJ

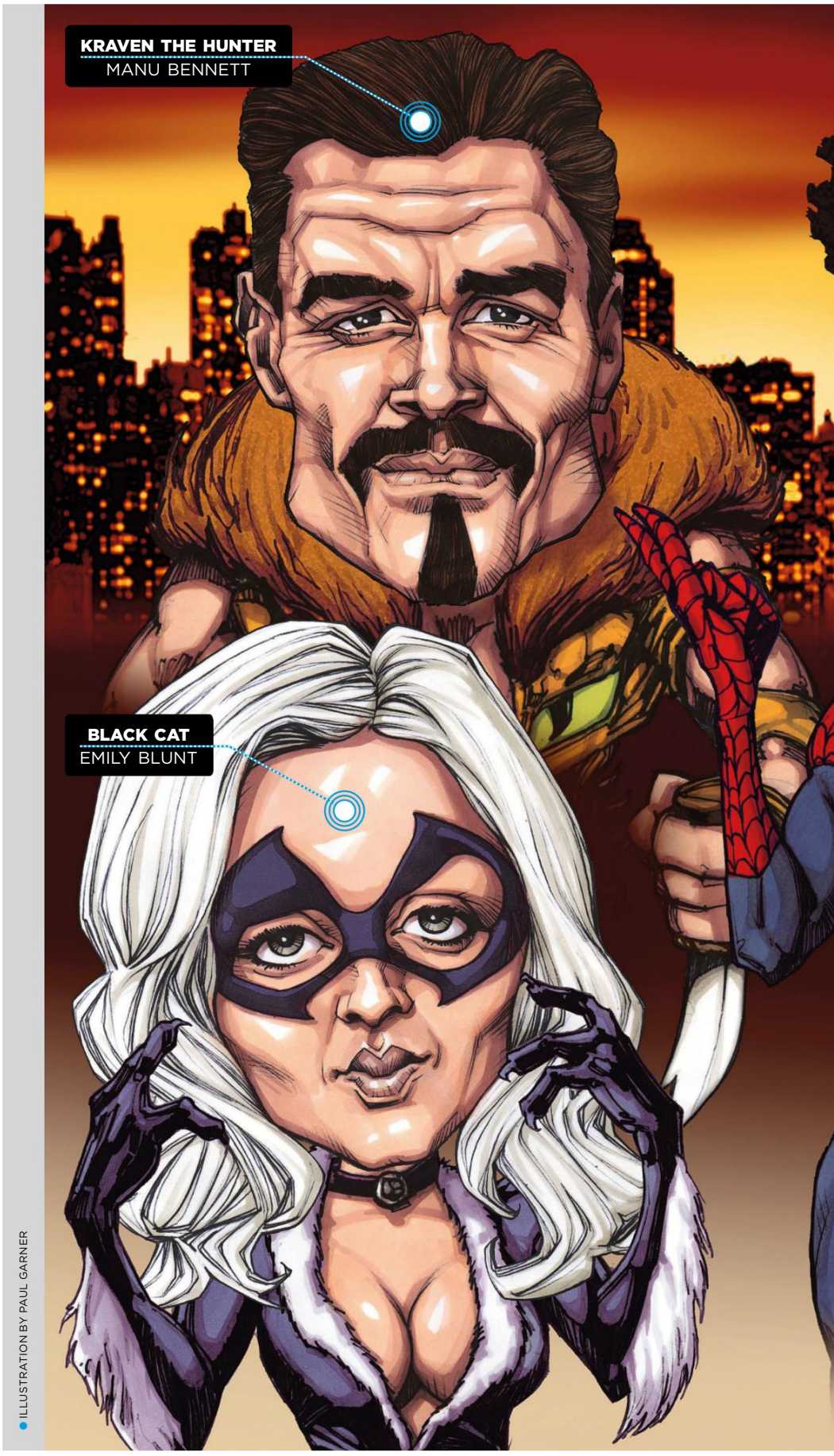
3 Another very popular choice was the return of newspaper mogul J Jonah Jameson, and there's only one man you'd like to see at the head of the *Daily Bugle*. "J Jonah Jameson played again by the awesome JK Simmons," says **Edward Terrell**, echoing the opinion of, well, everyone.

New Villains

4 Despite exchanging blows with seven different supervillains over the course of five Spider-Man films Hollywood has barely made a dent in the Webslinger's rogues' gallery, which is why you'd like a villain (note the singular) new to the big screen take centre stage, or at the very least an old favourite done justice. "An entirely new villain like Kraven (or Carnage if you wanna draw in the crowds)," says **Joel Newton**.

Keep It Street Level

5 A great idea to complement the world-threatening stories every other superhero film deals in – take Spidey back to basics. "A good street level story. Use Kingpin. If they need supervillains maybe adapt *Kraven's Last Hunt*," says **Manicben**.



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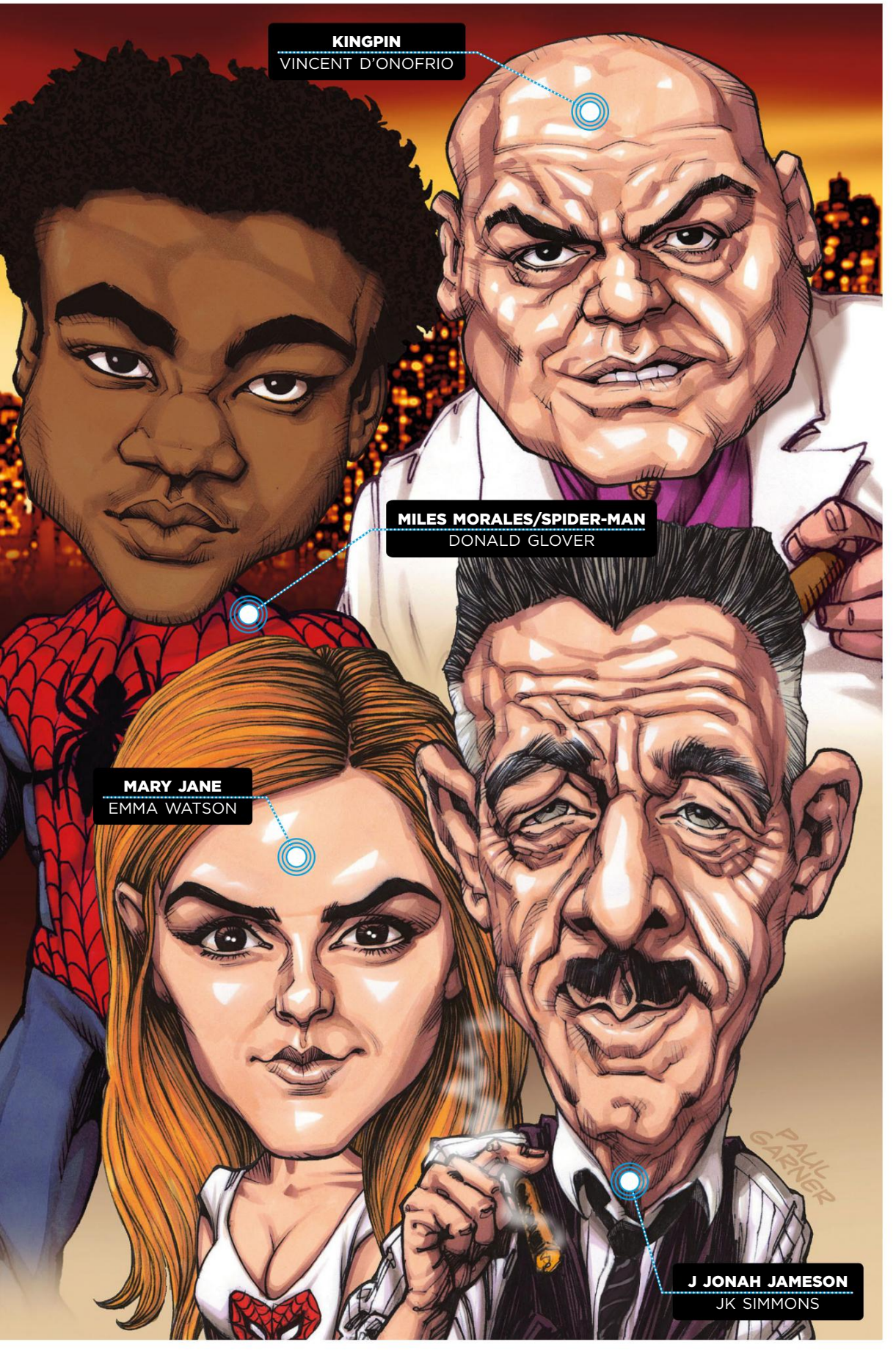


ARE YOU LISTENING?

Clear the cobwebs out of your ears, Hollywood

- A proper Venom arc played out across three films and culminating with Carnage as the primary villain of the third film. ***Marc Farmer***
- Donald Glover as Miles Morales. Anyone who's seen *Community* knows he'd be perfect. ***Sarah Watts***
- I really, really want to see the gobby wisecracking teenage Peter Parker. I don't want angst, I want chutzpah and the Webhead to shine. ***Catherine Nugent***
- A Green Goblin that looks like the original Goblin and not a demented Power Ranger. ***Mark Hogg***
- Spidey grew up in the comics, he should be allowed to do so on screen. ***Gary Mancini***
- Chameleon or Kraven the Hunter (done well). ***Chris Wing***
- No origin story needed, everyone knows how he got his powers. ***Jason Davies***
- Logan Lerman from *Percy Jackson* as Spidey, Chris Pratt as the Vulture and Emma Watson as Mary Jane. ***Kevin Hall***
- A fun, angst-free crime-fighting romp featuring little or no Parker family nonsense. ***Paolo Bianco***
- I want Venom, Carnage or Toxin. ***Jacob Chrisp***
- Logan Lerman as Peter Parker would be great; also a new villain we haven't seen on the big screen before. ***Paul Downey***
- Simple: Iceman and Firestar. ***Graham Stygall***
- Mary Jane, J Jonah Jameson, Flash Thompson, Kraven and no origin story: perfect. ***Keith Baker***
- A Toby Maguire-starring *Spider-Man 4* about where is he now. ***Dominic Wasden***
- Bring Bollywood in to the MCU by having the Pavitr Prabhakar Spider-Man. ***Himesh Malde***
- Black Cat and Silver Sable. ***Balsa Andbjorck***
- The Kingpin and Green Goblin (with the comic book look from the '70s). ***Mark Baker***
- Morbius the Vampire. ***Terry Westmorland***
- NO ORIGIN STORY. NO ORIGIN STORY. But, besides that, NO ORIGIN STORY. ***FlangeBadger***

COMING SOON

Highlander and Ghost In The Shell

Don't lose your head: the *Highlander* and *Ghost In The Shell* remakes are (finally) heading to a Wishlist near you soon.

Send in your ideas about our current Wishlist by visiting **bit.ly/SFXwishlist**

Event Horizon

Because meeting up is every fan's right

DON'T MISS IT!

London Book & Screen Week

13-19 April 2015

Steven Ellis talks to director Jacks Thomas about the literary event and embracing the screen

HOW DID THIS EVENT COME ABOUT?

It seemed a natural step to build on our day jobs. Each year 25,000 people from over 100 countries descend on London for one of the biggest events in the global publishing calendar – the London Book Fair. Books have always been, and continue to be, unbelievably flexible; it's extraordinary to consider that over half of the top 20 global box office successes of the last decade were adapted from novels by UK writers. Alongside the book fair, events celebrating authors and creators take place in a variety of venues – bookshops, cinemas, universities, museums and high street stores. We're in a unique position to link publishers with readers, and fans with their heroes. It's an obvious step to try and aggregate all this activity under one umbrella.

WHAT WILL THE EVENT ENTAIL?

Firstly, it's hundreds of events spanning the whole capital: author talks, writing masterclasses, film screenings, a comics draw-along, fan expos, cook book demonstrations, bookshop crawls, literary salons, live readings, poetry parties, fiction prizes, book launches... the scope is huge. For the *SFX* community there's the *Guardian* Masterclass in writing and publishing fantasy and dystopian fiction with Joe Abercrombie and Peter V Brett. Those partial to fan fiction will be in good company at Mugglenet's *Harry Potter* fan expo. You can learn art techniques with a draw-along at Orbital Comics. No book-to-screen line up would be complete without a splash of *Game Of Thrones*, so we're planning a social networking competition to choose favourite episodes. There will also be a number of screenings with partner OurScreen at Picturehouse Cinemas.

YOU'RE TAKING SUBMISSIONS FOR EVENT IDEAS ON YOUR WEBSITE; HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

We want to give everyone a chance to join in, lots of events are taking place; we wanted to give everyone the opportunity to put them all in one place so readers and fans can find everything. LBSW is a platform for both the largest launches and the most niche reading groups. We can't hope to know everything that's going on so we're asking people to let us know. The response has been fab with the first event submitted within minutes of LBSW being announced. New events are announced daily so watch out for our newsletters and check out the website: **www.londonbookandscreenweek.co.uk**

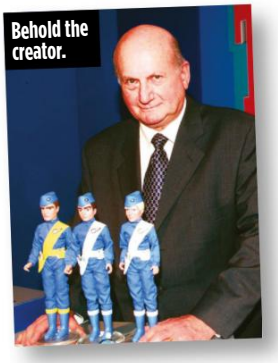
DON'T MISS IT!

Tele-fantasy And Society

6 May 2015, Lincoln University

Steven Ellis looks ahead to an Anderson academic event

LIKE YOUR SCI-FI EVENTS WITH a little bit of smarts? Then you're in luck because Lincoln University is hosting a one-day symposium, Tele-fantasy And Society, on Wednesday 6 May. In the words of organiser Alex Lewczuk, senior lecturer in English and Journalism at the university, the event is designed to "provide an opportunity to network, reflect and celebrate the variety and quality of SF and tele-fantasy produced or related to the UK and US. This is the first tele-fantasy event we've staged, although in partnership with the Lincoln Inspired festival we have produced events relating to *Doctor Who* and the steampunk genre in previous years."



One of the day's main subjects will be the late Gerry Anderson and there'll be a lecture by his son Jamie. Lewczuk said of Anderson: "He's synonymous with Walt Disney and Jim Henson in terms of creative output, the 50th anniversary of the much-beloved original *Thunderbirds* series and new incarnation provided the perfect launch for the symposium."

The event promises a packed schedule featuring panels by keynote speakers Professor Richard J Hand from the Cardiff School of Creative and Cultural Industries, who will present on US horror TV adaptations; followed by Dr Fiona Moore, from the University of South Wales, alongside Alan Stevens, who will give a lecture on their work with *Blake's 7*, *The Prisoner* and *BSG*. Other delegates include our very own ed Richard Edwards!

For more information visit **http://bit.ly/LincolnSymposium**

UPCOMING

Dates meet diary, diary meet dates...

Chevron 8.2

24-26 April

Fan of *Stargate*? Then you're in luck because actors from all three small screen series will be at the Radisson Blue Heathrow Hotel for this three-day event. ***http://bit.ly/Chevron82***

Dimension Jump XVIII

1-3 May

The long-running official *Red Dwarf* convention welcomes Chris Barrie, Danny John-Jules, Robert Llewellyn and more to Nottingham. ***http://www.dimensionjump.info/***

Doctor Who Symphonic Spectacular

23-29 May

The sonic celebration of Murray Gold's *Who* music is touring the UK, mixing live performances and theatrical elements. ***http://bit.ly/WhoSpectacular***

Andercon

13-14 June

Celebrate all things Anderson with the second annual con dedicated to the puppet maestro. ***www.andercon.co.uk***

Sci-fi By The Sea

21 June

Meet Sylvester McCoy, Virginia Hey and Jeremy Bulloch at Herne Bay during the third Sci-fi By The Sea. ***www.scifibythesea.co.uk***

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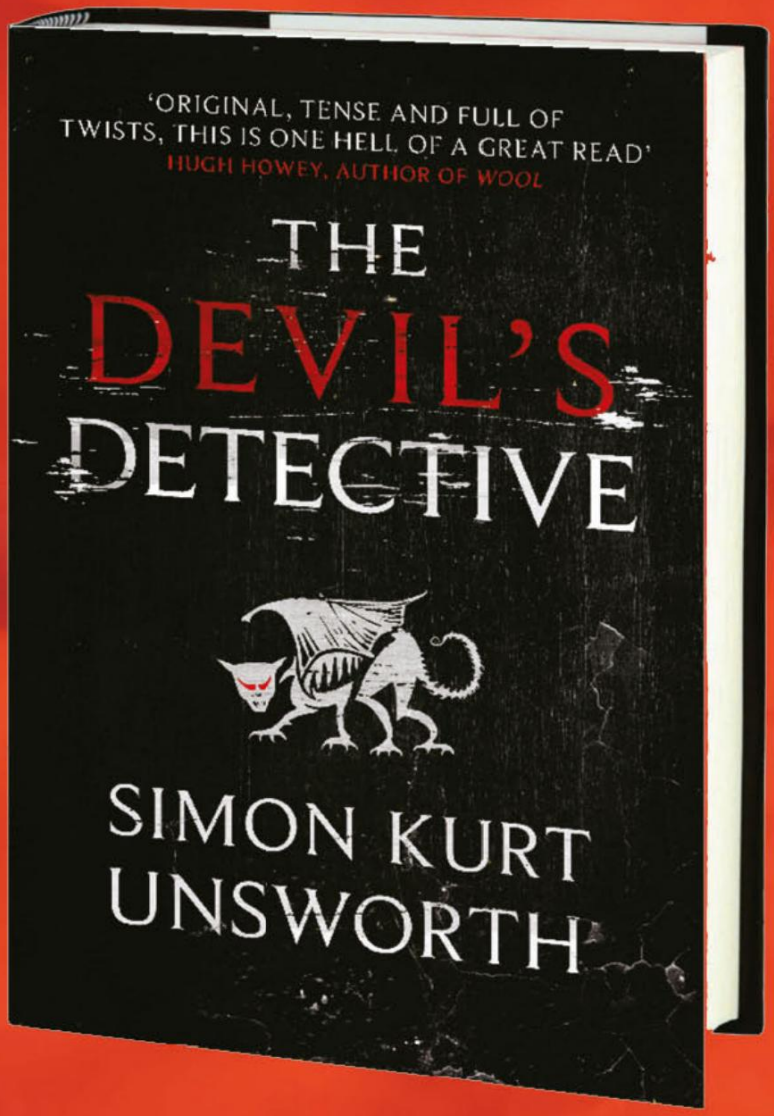
Welcome to the real criminal underworld... Welcome to hell!



'DAMNED GOOD' FT

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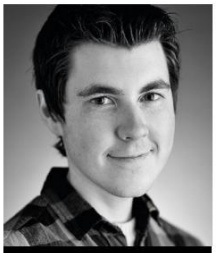
Blastermind

Celebrate 30 glorious years of Studio Ghibli with our quiz on the Japanese animation powerhouse



THIS MONTH'S QUIZMASTER
Jordan Farley, Community Editor

GET MORE QUIZZES ONLINE AT
BIT.LY/SFXQUIZ

1 What was the first film produced by Studio Ghibli?

2 During the famous scene at the bus stop in *My Neighbour Totoro*, what does Totoro have on his head?

3 *Totoro* was released on the same day in Japan as which other Ghibli film?

4 The look of the city in *Kiki's Delivery Service* was inspired by which European country?

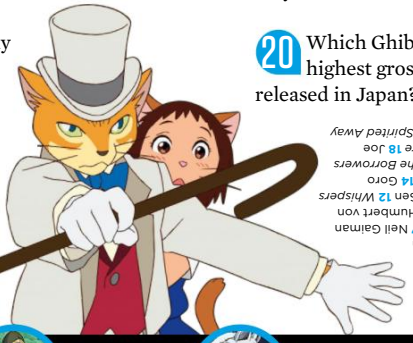
5 *Porco Rosso* was based on a manga written by Hayao Miyazaki, true or false?

6 Who voices Porco in the Disney dub?

7 Who wrote the English adaptation of *Princess Mononoke*?

8 Which NSFW body part is frequently visible on the raccoon dogs in *Pom Poko*?

9 What is the full name of the cane-wielding cat in this picture?



10 How many animation cels were created for *Princess Mononoke*: 144,000, 262,000 or 500,000?

11 What name is Chihiro given by Yubaba when she arrives at the bathouse in *Spirited Away*?

12 *The Cat Returns* is an indirect sequel to which non-SF Ghibli film?

13 Howl's Moving Castle walks on limbs resembling what?

14 What is the name of Hayao Miyazaki's son, director of *Tales From Earthsea*?

15 Finish the first line of *Ponyo*'s English theme song: "Ponyo, Ponyo, Ponyo..."

16 *Arrietty* is an adaptation of which beloved British fantasy novel?

17 One Ghibli film has yet to be released in the UK – what is it called?

18 Who wrote the music for every Miyazaki-directed Ghibli film?

19 Studio Ghibli produced the cutscenes for which PlayStation 3 RPG?

20 Which Ghibli film is still the highest grossing movie ever released in Japan?

ANSWERS 1 *Castle In The Sky* 2 A leaf 3 *Grave Of The Fireflies* 4 Sweden 5 True 6 Michael Keaton 7 Neil Gaiman 8 Their testicles 9 Baron Humbert von Gikkingen 10 144,000 11 Sen 12 *Whispers Of The Heart* 13 Bird feet 14 Goro 15 "...fishy in the sea" 16 *The Borrowers* 17 *When Marnie Was There* 18 Joe Hisaishi 19 *Ni No Kuni* 20 *Spirited Away*

HOW DID YOU DO?

Which Ghibli creature are you?

0-5 The Cat King

6-10 The Kashira

11-15 Laputan Robot

16-19 Moro

20 Totoro

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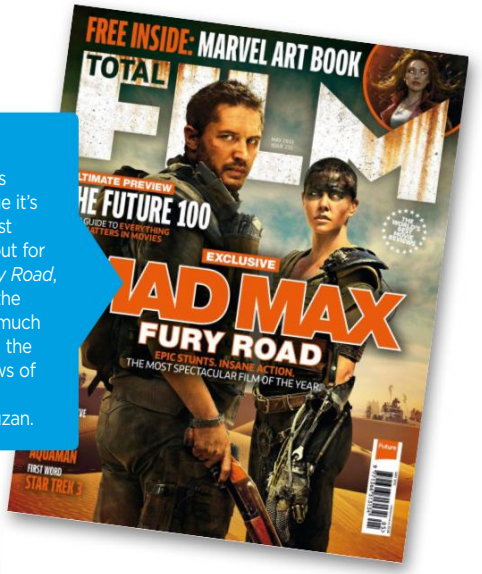
The World Of SFX

Don't stop here: there's always more for you to read...

SFX ON GAMESRADAR+

SFX's website home is now at **GamesRadar.com**, where you can find all manner of stuff that we can't fit in the regular magazine. Did you know, for instance, that we have daily news updates of what's hot in sci-fi? Or that we're reviewing episodes of TV shows like *Powers*, *Agents Of SHIELD*, *The Flash* and *Gotham* there? You can also find new features every day (including lots of coverage of the new season of *Game Of Thrones*), competitions, trailers, film reviews and more. At **gamesradar.com** you also get videogames and non SF movies, but if it's sci-fi you're after then bookmark **gamesradar.com/sfx**. Today!



TOTAL FILM

Every month our sister mag *Total Film* brings you fantastic coverage of the movies. This issue it's the Future 100, an epic list of the hundred most important people, topics and movies to look out for in the next year. They go big on *Mad Max: Fury Road*, catch up with *Star Trek*'s Simon Pegg, profile the stars of the upcoming *Star Wars* movies, and much more. All this, plus a free supplement covering the astonishing artwork of Marvel's Phase 2, reviews of the latest movies to hit screens big and small, and an interview with poster genius Drew Struzan.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO FANTASY

It may be spring, but winter is (still) coming. The latest bookazine from the brains behind *SFX* and *Total Film* celebrates the return of *Game Of Thrones* with a preview of season five. There are also interviews with the cast and crew, a sightseeing tour of King's Landing (aka Dubrovnik) and episode guides for seasons three and four. Outside of Westeros, we go back in time with set visits for all eight of the *Harry Potter* movies and celebrate Peter Jackson's Middle-earth hexalogy. *The Ultimate Guide To Fantasy* is on sale now or you can order your copy online, with free postage, at **bit.ly/SFXfantasy**

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"He's Desmond, you're Porkpie"

WINNER OF SFX'S SECOND ZOMBIE SHORT STORY COMPETITION!

THE BIG GUY

by Emma Woodcock

The sound of bolts snapping back. Hushed voices. A crack of light, thin as a hair, but blinding. It's been months, I suppose. Time ceases to exist in the darkness.

The first latch flicks back, then the second. The door eases a little, as though drawing a breath. There's a pause before it's thrown open, and the light floods in, unbearably bright. I recoil – as far as the restraints allow – seeing nothing but formless, liquid shapes.

"He's frightened."

Mila. She's still here then.

"Nonsense. He always does this. Come on. Wakey wakey."

And Gustav. Of course. It's always Gustav. "Up and at 'em, big guy."

"Should I do the-?"

Gustav makes an impatient gesture, and Mila picks something up from the table, weaving back and forth in front of the light. My eyes are adjusting now, making sense of the figures. More are crowded behind these two, peering forward fearfully.

A small voice from the back, "Is he dangerous?"

Mila presses her lips together, as though to prevent any answer escaping.

"Not if handled correctly," says Gustav. "Observe the double restraints. They must remain in place until the inhibitor is administered. Mila, if you would?"

She leans closer, touches my arm. Her fingers are warm with sweat. After so long without sensation of any kind, the touch is startling, revelatory.

Please, I want to say, but it comes out an incoherent croak.

She recoils, almost dropping the syringe.

Gustav rolls his eyes. "Shall I do it?"

"Sorry, Sir. No, I can manage. But, are you sure? I mean-"

"We've been over this."

"I know, but seeing him like this-"

"And over."

"It just doesn't-"

"And over."

"Seem right."

"Objection noted. Please continue."

She swallows. "Yes, Sir."

No doubt she tries to be gentle, but to my heightened senses the scratch of the syringe is monstrous.

A heaviness comes to my still bound limbs. But it is an odd effect of the drugs that even as they dull my senses and inhibit my actions, my brain becomes more alert, memories sharper. To Gustav it is a year since we last began this game. To me, no time at all. My thought processes pick up where they left off when he closed the box, 11 months, 30 days ago.

Mila unfastens one strap, and then another. I droop forward, almost collapsing without their support.

"Come on out, then," says Gustav. "My team have outdone themselves this year. We have *Minecraft* plushies. We have remote control quad bikes. We have robot dinosaurs that pee their pants. I'm not even kidding. That's what kids want."

I curl a hand around the box, steadying myself before I lurch forward with rusty, awkward steps. Gustav stands his ground as the younger ones shrink back.

"No," I tell him.

"Don't be like that. We all agreed, this is for the best. Would you leave the poor kiddies disappointed?"

I glance at Mila. She drops her gaze, murmurs, "There are other ways, Sir."

"Don't start on about online shops!" he says, anger flaring. "*Transactions. Paypal. Postage and Packing!* It is not the elf way. We create for the joy of it. We give freely of our skills. I will not sully our traditions with *financial exchanges!*"

Her cheeks flush. "Come and see the team," she says to me. "That always cheers you up."

I let her lead me past the cowering others, down a narrow corridor where strings of coloured lights twinkle on the walls. She opens a heavy door, and animal smells surround me: hay

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and fur and rotting meat. Even here, flashing lights are strung across the stalls.

Reluctantly, I draw closer. "Vixen, old girl." I lay a stiff hand on the creature's head. Her ears are cold, ragged. She glances at me, as bone-weary as I am. How long has it been now? Since age and ill health claimed me – and the elves, my immortal helpers, my makers, claimed me back again.

"Blitzen." I move to the next stall. He is in a sorrier state than Vixen. Ribs show through the parchment skin. His eyes droop, seeing nothing. I move on, greeting each of them in turn, looking for some spark of recognition, some remaining spirit.

I reach the final stall. "Rudolph?"

He raises his head just a little. One eye swivels towards me, and the ears come forward. He still knows me, and it breaks what remains of my heart. A beast's suffering is always nobler than a man's. A man knows why he is punished, or can guess. He can blame himself for a thousand small mistakes and wrongs – whether they have any bearing on the issue or not. A beast understands nothing but that it is in pain, and it cannot fathom why – or why those it loves do not help.

"It's almost time," says Mila. "I'll fetch your jacket."

I don't respond. My fingers stroke Rudolph's cold, dribbling nose. He shivers, gives a wheezy bark.

"I know, old friend. I want it to end as much as you do."

I glance at the coloured lights, winking on and off endlessly in preordained patterns.

She has left me alone. She is not supposed to do that. He will be angry with her.

I snatch down the lights, swiftly winding the cable around Rudolph's scrawny neck. The little bulbs shatter, jagged edges piercing his desiccated hide, and my own. He still has a bit of fight left in him; kicks at the stall, shakes his big head from side to side, working the wire deeper into his flesh.

The commotion brings the others. A twitter of high, anxious voices, and then Gustav barking orders. A syringe is found, and another dose administered. The sense of purpose drains from me, and I allow the little hands to subdue me, steering me away from the thrashing reindeer.

A sudden silence signals Mila's return. "It was only for a moment!" she says, before he has a chance to accuse her. "I thought it would be alright. He seemed so quiet."

"Just get the jacket on him."

I allow them to dress me, pulling the huge red coat over my sagging body, fastening the buttons and buckling the belt.

"He doesn't fill it like he used to."

They stand guard over me as the skeletal reindeer are led out and harnessed to the sleigh. Last comes Rudolph, staggering, his big head drooping. My swollen hands are ringed with blood where wire and crushed glass has dug in. The little finger is almost severed, hanging at an odd, helpless angle.

"What were you thinking?" Gustav's voice is soft, like that of a concerned friend. "Strangulation wouldn't end him. You know that. Don't you remember when you tried to hang yourself?"

I was aiming to decapitate him, but there is no need to tell him what I know and what I remember. There is always next year. There is always another attempt.

I look up at my team of undead reindeer, my sleigh filled with presents for children who don't know what it takes to bring them this joy each year.

Mila cranks the handle, and the gramophone starts up. Tinny sleigh bells jingle. I sit up at once, tense, alert. I have tried to fight it. As often as I have tried to end my unendurable existence, and that of the reindeer. But it is impossible. Whatever they have done to me, they have done it well.

Reanimation. Mind control. These things do not contradict the Elf Way.

The piano comes in. *Next year*, I promise myself. *Next year I will escape.*

The scratchy voices begin: *Dashing through the snow, in a one-horse open sleigh...*

And I am gone. Only Father Christmas remains. He climbs into the sleigh, he takes up the reins, as he is programmed. He waves to the elves as they load the last presents onto the back. He launches into the sky with a hollow, "Ho Ho Ho!"

ZOM-B DARREN SHAN THE MASTER OF HORROR

The Writing Dead

After the phenomenal success of the first Writing Dead zombie short story competition, we've teamed up with Simon & Schuster and *Zom-B* author Darren Shan again for a follow-up. This time we upped the ante a bit – as before, the stories had to be about zombies and couldn't exceed 1,500 words, but as an extra challenge, every story had to include Christmas tree lights as a prop, and a zombie in a Santa outfit.

Loads of you entered again, with stories ranging from the downright scary to the screwball and weird. The *SFX* team read them all before handing a shortlist of five over to Darren for the final judging. He picked "The Big Guy" by Emma Woodcock. "All of the stories were well written, but this one tugged at my heartstrings," says Darren. "It masterfully pulled me in, intriguing me with its mysterious opening, before gradually revealing what is truly happening, and leaving me with a sense of great pity for the main character by the end. It's very difficult to do all that in such a short story, to pack in true surprise and emotion, so as strong as the other entries were, this was the clear stand-out for me. I'll never think of the Big Guy in quite the same way again..."

Emma wins a signed set of nine *Zom-B* books, as published by Simon & Schuster, a freaky *Zom-B Baby* statue, and the honour of having her story printed here. The four other shortlisted story writers will each receive a signed set of books.

Zom-B: Bride, the latest story in the saga, is on sale now.

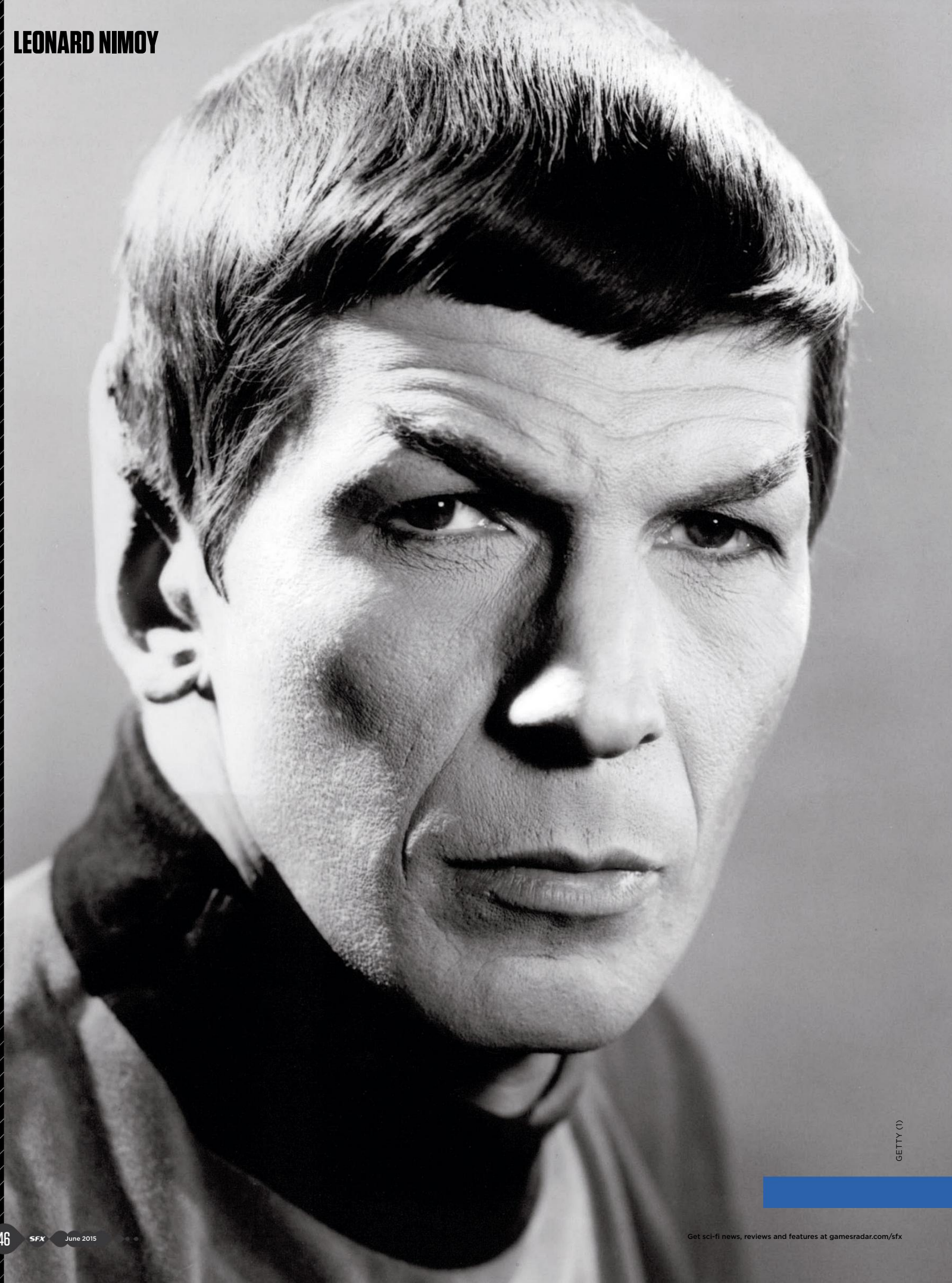
THE OTHER SHORTLISTED STORIES WERE...

"The 'Elf' Day Of Christmas" by AH Cassells

"Warmth" by Ian McCaig

"A Christmas Eve Commotion" by Damien Mckeating

"Good Girl" by Martin Rowe



GETTY (1)

He Was Spock

Nick Setchfield pays tribute to Star Trek legend LEONARD NIMOY, who died in February

SPOCK WAS ALL ABOUT THE mind but Leonard Nimoy was the heart of *Trek*.

He was there at the beginning – his was the only character to survive the show's original, misfiring 1964 pilot "The Cage" – and he was there in 2013's *Star Trek Into Darkness*, the most recently explored edge of the final frontier. As an actor, a director, a producer and a writer he shaped Spock and the universe around him for nearly 50 years. Spock may have been half-human, half-Vulcan but Nimoy became, at first reluctantly, half-human, half-icon.

He was the face as well as the heart, of course – and a poster boy for science fiction itself. It was a remarkable face: a long, gaunt, Mount Rushmore sculpture, the deep lines that framed the wide mouth seemingly carved by geological erosion. The eyes were dark, precise, intelligent, as capable of brooding rumination as a winning twinkle. Teamed with the upswept angles of that startling Vulcan physiognomy it became one of the most famous faces of the 20th century.

Nimoy never imagined his face would win him stardom. Born in Boston on 26 March 1931 – four days after his future friend and co-star William Shatner – this son of Ukrainian immigrants considered himself "an ethnic type" whose unconventional looks would forever deny him a leading man payday.

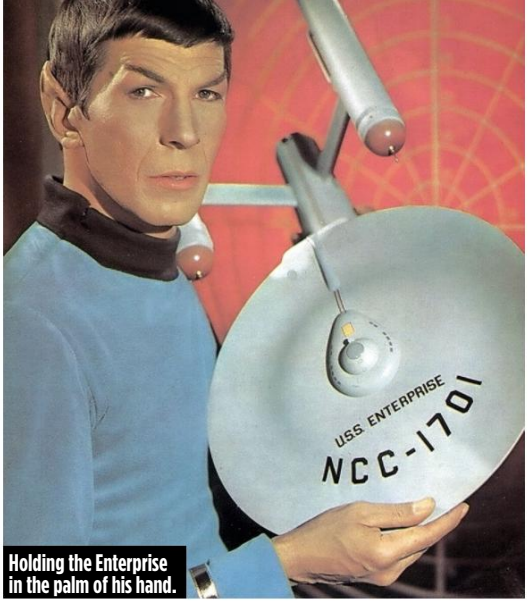
Arriving in Hollywood in 1949, Nimoy had a first taste of the SF genre in Saturday matinee serial *Zombies Of The Stratosphere*. Its clunking dialogue and dimestore, plywood-and-prayer aesthetics didn't deter a young, hungry actor who would soon dream of emulating screen revolutionaries Brando, Clift and Dean. "It was very primitive and very crude," he told *SFX* in 2010, "but I was eager to do the work and happy to get it."

He was a dependable TV player for a decade, frequently cast as a lean, saturnine presence in gunslinging sagas like *Wagon Train* and *Rawhide*. Between gigs he worked as a cab driver in Beverly Hills and Westwood. Once he gave a ride to a promising junior senator from Massachusetts named John F Kennedy. "He never seemed to run out of questions," Nimoy remembered of his fated fare. "He just kept popping questions at me throughout the whole trip."

For any generation reared on *Star Trek* Spock had always been there, somehow, like a statue discovered on a distant world. He seemed an eternal, blue-shirted fixture, as much a part of the imaginative fabric of childhood as Santa or Batman. And Nimoy, surely, was inseparable from Spock, as if the two had been twinned by fate – or at least a smart casting director. But *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry had other options: he considered casting a black performer as the Vulcan, or dwarf actor Michael Dunn, alias villainous Dr Miguelito Loveless in *The Wild Wild West*. Martin Landau was also in the frame; future *Trek* co-star DeForest Kelley, too.

Nimoy now seems the only possible choice, the only *logical* choice, in any parallel world. Instinctively drawn to alienated types, he was intrigued by the thought of a character defined by internal conflict. "There was a dynamic there to work with from an acting point of view," he recalled of his first encounter with Spock, then just a mass of dialogue and stage directions on xeroxed script pages, waiting for life.

At first he rebelled against the ears. Nimoy was mortified when the crew teased him with the nickname Jackrabbit, fretting that the show's audience would share their mirth. A friend thought Spock would kill his career ↬



Holding the Enterprise in the palm of his hand.

GETTY (1), REX (1)

> "There was a dynamic there to work with from an acting point of view"

A rare smile in original *Trek* pilot "The Cage".

THE SEVEN GREATEST SPOCK MOMENTS

"JIM!" – "AMOK TIME"

✶ There's a disturbingly fratricidal vibe to the sight of a hormone-crazed Spock brawling with Kirk in an ancient Vulcan combat rite. His reaction to discovering he hasn't actually killed his best friend after all – a joyous, magnificently unguarded cry of "Jim!" – remains one of his sweetest, most revealingly human moments.

SPOCK'S DEATH – *STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN*

✶ "He did not feel this sacrifice a vain or empty one," eulogises Kirk at Spock's funeral – and ain't that the truth. The moment a radiation-ravaged Spock straightens his tunic in a bid to preserve decorum is one of Nimoy's subtlest, most resonant acting choices.

EYEBROW RAISE – *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*

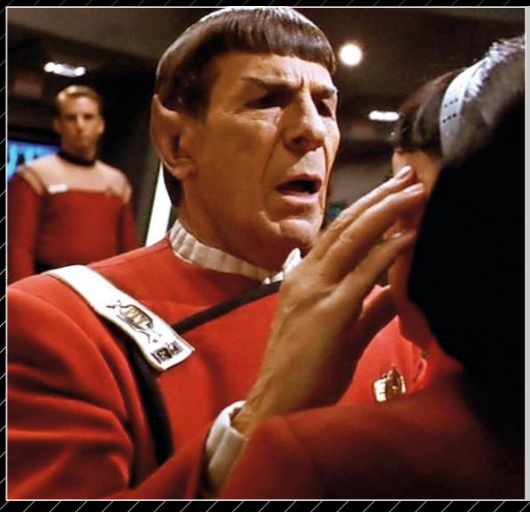
✶ Spock is back. But is this the man we knew? As his friends crowd around him, the resurrected Vulcan appears to be a hollow shell, stripped of his memories. And then he raises an iconically quizzical eyebrow. And all is suddenly right in the universe.

MIRROR SPOCK – "MIRROR MIRROR"

✶ Kirk and crew beam into a parallel universe, confronting a very different Mr Spock. The Goatee of Evil has become pop-culture shorthand for twisted twins, but Nimoy brings an intriguing complexity to his Machiavellian counterpart, hinting at Spock's own shadows.

NERVE-PINCH – *STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME*

✶ Trapped on a bus with the last punk in San Francisco, Spock deals with ghetto-blasting '80s hell in his own inimitable way: a timely application of the Vulcan nerve pinch. Pure crowd-pleasing wish-fulfilment, pure deadpan Spock hilarity.



VALERIS MIND MELD – *STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY*

✶ One of the most contentious scenes in *Trek* history has Spock implementing a forced mind meld, ransacking Valeris' innermost thoughts for clues to the conspiracy against the galactic peace settlement. Nimoy shows us glimmers of Spock's barely repressed disgust, both at his duplicitous protégé and his own morally debatable methods. His darkest moment.

"THRUSTERS ON FULL" – *STAR TREK*

✶ Watching from afar, the original Spock witnesses Kirk inherit command of the Enterprise, ready to boldly go where another universe has gone before. "Thrusters on full," he whispers. It was an ad-lib by Nimoy that beautifully passed the torch to *Trek*'s future.

"Does it worry me that I will only be remembered for Spock? No."

and urged him to play the role in even heavier make-up, hiding his face completely. Network paymasters NBC saw the pilot and declared "Leonard Nimoy isn't a problem, but the role he plays is a major problem! If you want to lose Nimoy, that's also fine with us. You've already heard the sales department reaction to the character... Though the Mister Spock character is interesting and probably has potential, its inclusion in our new pilot could possibly keep *Star Trek* off the air as a series."

I GROK SPOCK

Five decades on, these qualms seem laughably short-sighted. But that's to undervalue what Nimoy brought to a character who could, in less talented hands, have become a tacky, barely remembered slice of '60s pop-culture. His sincere, layered, endlessly intriguing performance as the stoic Vulcan made him so much more than "the guy with the ears." Spock worked because of Leonard Nimoy: the dignity and depth he brought to the ship's first officer.

Spock – and Nimoy – defined *Star Trek*. The character chimed with the moonshot-Woodstock times, his rangy, space age cool and mystic's demeanour winning the hearts of the hippies. "I Grok Spock" became a popular bumper sticker on the California freeways. He may have been the ice to Kirk's fire but he had sex appeal, too. Producer Bob Justman likened him to the new foreign sailor in town, cosmic catnip. Kids, too, loved him, reading his adventures in comic strips, creating their own with action figures.

Success blindsided Nimoy. He was so unprepared for it that his name was still in the LA phone book when *Star Trek* aired. Strangers would call him up, eager to connect with the man behind this fascinating new character, unlike anyone seen on television. Aliens had always been ruthless, monstrous, invading. Now they were halfway to human.

In a sense Nimoy lost himself in Spock. The daily stint in the make-up chair became a transformational ritual. "I saw it happening in the mirror," he remembered. "It was as though, if I fooled around or laughed a lot, my face would crack. As though I would damage myself in some way; destroy the character and hurt myself."

Spock began to eclipse his captain, Nimoy his co-star. In July 1967 Isaac Asimov wrote to Gene Roddenberry, who had turned to him for advice on dealing with this fractious dynamic. "The problem," agreed Asimov, "is how to convince the world, and Mr Shatner, that Mr Shatner is the lead." Roddenberry's solution was to ensure the pair were written as more of a team but *Trek* remained Nimoy's star vehicle as much as Shatner's. The two would be locked into friendly rivalry forever.

Nimoy knew he was the break-out character, the phenomenon, but he was never a selfish star. He fought for equal pay for Nichelle Nichols, who played Uhura, dismayed to discover she was shortchanged compared to her male colleagues. But he fought for Spock, too, endlessly concerned that the character wasn't being served by the scripts. "There were times when the writer had so completely forgotten that he had introduced Mr Spock into the scene that he forgot to have Spock make the exit with Kirk, and tags the scene simply with 'Kirk leaves'," he complained to producer Bob Justman.

Star Trek's cancellation in 1969 freed him of the grind, if not the fame. "I was making money but I felt I wasn't involved in anything prideful any more," he said of the show's lacklustre final season. He joined *Mission: Impossible*, hoping his turn as master of disguise Paris would re-establish him as a character actor. He played Vincent Van Gogh in an acclaimed stage show, cultivated lifelong interests in poetry and photography and launched himself as a director with an episode of Rod Serling's horror anthology

Looking natty on a planet that's modelled itself on 1920s Chicago.

Co-stars, rivals, friends.

GETTY (2), REX (2)

BEYOND THE 23RD CENTURY

Spock wasn't Leonard Nimoy's only genre credit. Here are ten more...

FRINGE (2009–12)

✳ Nimoy's swansong role would see him adored by a new generation of SF fans, playing tortured, reclusive genius Dr William Bell in JJ Abrams' reality-spanning drama.

THE SIMPSONS (1993–97)

✳ Skewering his public image, Nimoy beamed down to Springfield as an anecdote-mining celeb bore. Recent ep "The Princess Guide" was dedicated to his memory.

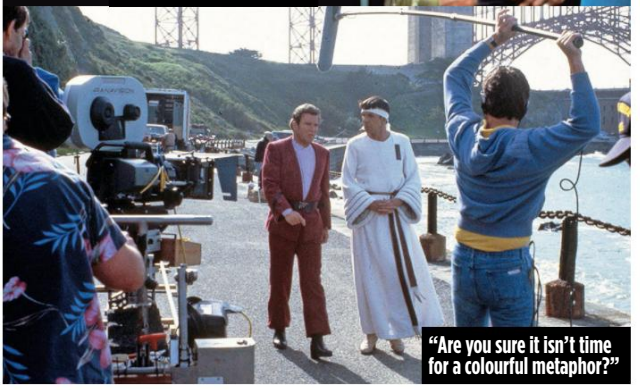
TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE (1986)

✳ In the unlikely company of Orson Welles and, um, Eric Idle, Nimoy lent his vocal cords to Galvatron in this animation. He also showed up in Michael Bay's third *Transformers*.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (1978)

✳ A jittery remake brought pod-powered paranoia to '70s San Francisco, casting Nimoy as a doomed psychiatrist.

Star Trek: the dream team.



"Are you sure it isn't time for a colourful metaphor?"

Night Gallery, a career sidestep that would ultimately lead to him helming *Three Men And A Baby*, the biggest film of 1987.

SPOCK REBORN

Nimoy soon discovered he couldn't escape *Trek*'s remorseless tractor beam. "It drove me nuts!" he remembered, frustrated by the endless attention focused on this slice of his career. In 1977 he wrote *I Am Not Spock*, a loose autobiography whose title appeared to bait his worshippers. He would later recall attending a *Trek* convention in New York that year and sensing a frisson of hostility in the crowd.

"*I Am Not Spock* was hugely misunderstood," he told *SFX* in 1996. "I wasn't trying to turn my back on Spock. The title was tongue in cheek, but most people never read beyond the title and just made assumptions. It was never about denying Spock. He was, is, and always will be, an important part of my life."

Nimoy voiced Spock for the 1973 animated series but declined to reprise the Vulcan in *Star Trek Phase II*, a new live-action show in development in the late '70s. A young Vulcan named Xon was lined up to replace him, set to be played by an unknown actor named David Gautreaux. It verged on unthinkable, like regrouping the Beatles without John Lennon. Nimoy finally signed when the project leapt to the big screen in the wake of *Star Wars*.

1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* proved frustrating – Nimoy found many of his suggestions ignored in the final cut – but producer Harve Bennett lured him into superior sequel *The Wrath Of Khan* with the words "How would you like a great death scene?" *Star Trek III: The Search For Spock* followed in 1984. Nimoy was also behind the camera now, signed as director. He delivered another great death scene, this time for the Enterprise herself, arcing like a comet across an alien sky in one of the franchise's most striking and resonant images.

Nimoy returned to direct 1986's *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, a killingly witty time travel caper that became the first *Trek* movie to truly dock with the mainstream. It was a big-hearted crowdpleaser that proved his chops with ensemble comedy – he knew the combined power of the cast, the family, and found moments for all of his colleagues. His Spock, too, was an immaculately deadpan turn, an overdue showcase for his natural comic talent – a revelation after a sombre run of movies.

You suspect this period was Nimoy's most fulfilling time with *Trek*. He was finally fully engaged creatively: his ecological concerns shaped *The Voyage Home* and his political passions fired 1991's *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, a last hurrah for the original cast that mirrored a real world now very different to the one the show had been born into. Spock, too, had evolved, the character now able to declare "Logic is the beginning of wisdom, not the end." He wrote another book. This time it was titled *I Am Spock*.

Nimoy returned as the now aged, guru-like Vulcan in 2009's *Star Trek*, JJ Abrams' blockbuster reboot. It was the perfect passing of the torch to yet another generation, marginally undone by an unnecessary cameo in 2013's *Star Trek Into Darkness*. JJ Abrams just couldn't let him go. Could any of us?

Leonard Nimoy passed away on 27 February 2015. The cause of death was given as end-stage chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, attributed to decades of smoking, a habit he had kicked 30 years earlier. It was the kind of celebrity passing that felt seismic and truly mourned. Even the President of the United States, lifelong Trekkie Barack Obama, a man inspired by Spock, by Nimoy, was moved to tweet #LLAP, live long and prosper.

"Does it worry me that I will only be remembered for Spock? No, not at all," Nimoy told *SFX* in 1996. "Just to be remembered is enough. What do I hope people will remember about Spock? That he was interesting. Intriguing. Worthwhile. Different. Refreshing. Handsome."

And then he did that most un-Vulcan thing. He laughed.

In *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan* Spock ensured his survival by placing his katra – the sum of his soul, his spirit, his memories – in the mind of Dr McCoy. And then he whispered "Remember..." Leonard Nimoy placed his katra in all our minds. What else can we do but remember? SFX

Leonard Nimoy
26 March 1931 – 27 February 2015

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE (1969–71)

✶ How do you follow *Star Trek*? Get drafted into the IMF team as suave illusionist The Great Paris, that's how. Nimoy radiated '60s spy-fi cool.

THE OUTER LIMITS (1964)

✶ Nimoy appeared in the original adaptation of Earl and Otto Binder's "I, Robot" (unrelated to Isaac Asimov's book of the same name) – and also the 1995 remake.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE (1961)

✶ Rod Serling's fabled anthology show cast Nimoy as a WW2 grunt in time-twisting tale "A Quality Of Mercy", alongside *Quantum Leap*'s Dean Stockwell.

THE BRAIN EATERS (1958)

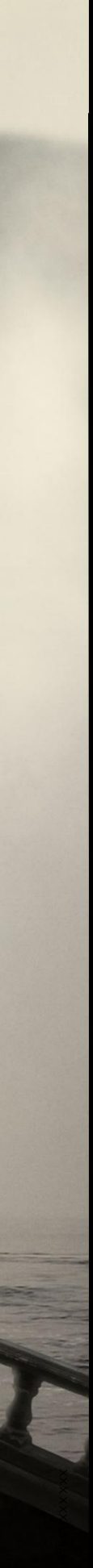
✶ "Crawling, slimy things terror-bent on destroying the world!" An early turn as a boffin in this B-movie schlockfest, he was mis-credited as Leonard Nemoy.

THEM! (1954)

✶ "A horror-horde of crawl and crush giants clawing out of the earth from mile-deep catacombs!" Blink and you'll miss Nimoy's uncredited turn as an army sergeant facing the menace of mutant ants.

ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE (1952)

✶ Nimoy's first dabble with alien DNA was as a ruthless Martian invader in this gloriously named Saturday matinee serial from the '50s.



ON SET ACCESS!

INTO THE DARK BEYOND

GAME *of* THRONES *is back.*

And it's not going soft, as Benji Wilson discovers

IN A CAVERNOUS STUDIO FIVE minutes drive from central Belfast, Maisie Williams, as Arya Stark, is tip-toeing through a stone room. Around the walls are carvings of gods and monsters. Her fists are clenched – a standard Arya pose – as she passes a hooded figure, a faceless man, and whispers "Valar Morghulis". The director says cut. Maisie does a quick running man dance and pulls a face. No notes, no changes, a perfect take.

Fans of the books would be able to tell by now that this is the House of Black and White, a key set for series five and the next stage of Arya Stark's journey from tomboy to cold-eyed assassin. But as to what's actually going on, your guess is as good as ours. It's virtually pitch black, barely a word is spoken and more's the point, if *SFX* had filleted any spoilers from the filming it'd be more than our lives' worth to share them with the world. *Game Of Thrones*, whose fifth series begins this April, is now such a massive worldwide cultural phenomenon that you'd have an easier time extracting Russian state secrets than getting the writers and producers to give something juicy away. When we speak to producer and writer Bryan Cogman along with Dave Hill, the series' new staff writer, a catchphrase is quickly established to rival "Valar Morghulis" – it's: "I can't tell you that."

To cut them some slack they are the main cogs in a huge machine, and they're busy. Our interview, which takes place behind the monitors between scenes for episode three, is constantly interrupted by runners, script advisors and actors looking to Cogman and Hill (Hill is like a *Game Of Thrones* tour guide, who appears to have a brain with the precise same topography as the seven kingdoms) for guidance and facts. ↬

It's understandable – with *Game Of Thrones*, you need pointers. There's such a vast mythology contained in George RR Martin's (known universally as GRRM) series of books, so many characters, cities and interlocking plotlines that part of the problem for the TV audience is making it very clear where we are, who knows what, and why this might be important. Then there's the TV series' inevitable – though still sometimes controversial – departure from the books. And it's all going to get that little bit more complex this time round. The show's creators David Benioff and Dan Weiss surprised everyone at Comic-Con this year, revealing that come season five *Game Of Thrones* will feature flashbacks, opening up a whole new labyrinth of backstories and narrative opportunities.

"It was debated and discussed," says Cogman, "and we just felt that, for this particular story that we're telling, the particular character that the flashback involves, it seemed like the right move."

This multi-layered complexity is what fans have come to love. On the other hand, it can make life confusing for the actors who have to bring the continents of Essos and Westeros to life. On the day we're on set Maisie Williams herself comes over to producer Cogman to ask him about the various deities on the wall (all from *Ice And Fire* iconography, it turns out) she is supposed to be pointing to. Later Tom Wlaschiha, who plays J'aqen Hager and will return for season five, pops over with a few mythology questions for resident oracle Hill, asking about the philosophy of the many-faced god.

The many-faced god, of course, is the God of Death. That's the same God of Death who spawned one of the series' best lines to date, when Arya's old sword teacher Syrio told her: "There is only one god, and his name is Death. And there is only one thing we say to Death: 'Not today.'"

> "We felt that, for the particular character that the flashback involves, it seemed like the right move"

DEAD MEN WALKING

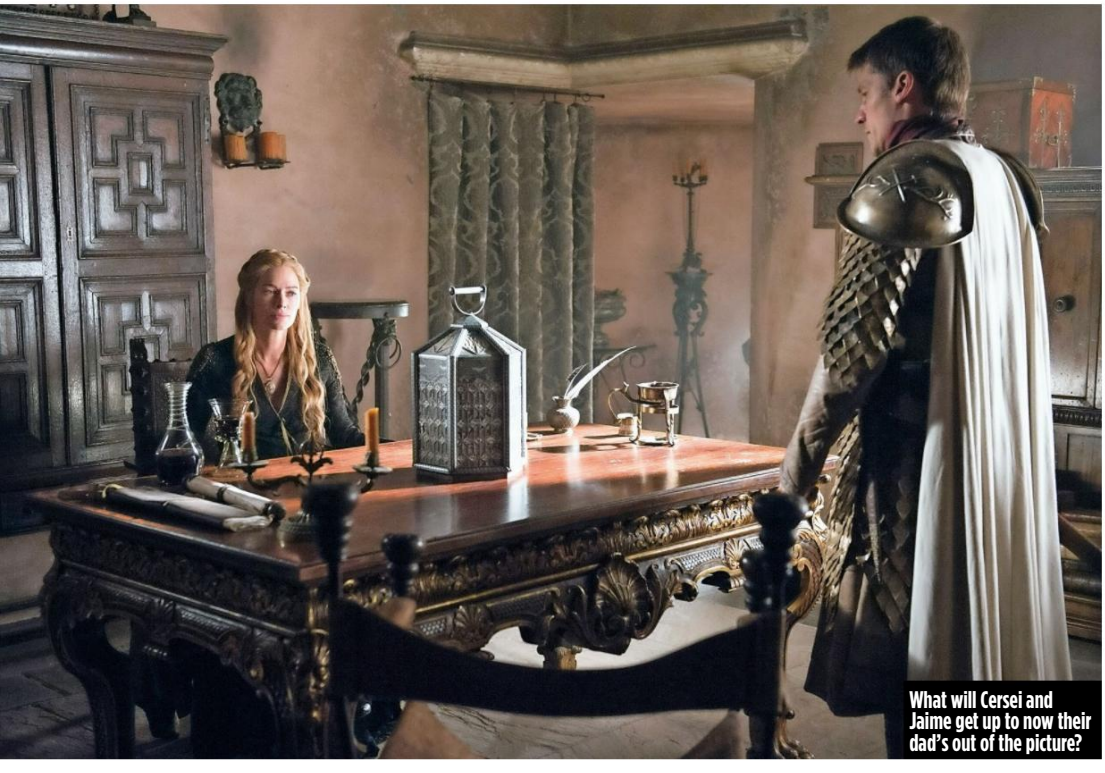
Death. But Not Today: it's as useful a summary as any for the entire series – a group of characters from different places and backgrounds spend their time trying to fend off death, in a world in which the only other certainty is that "All men must die", a truth so brutally obvious that it's been turned into a greeting, "Valar Morghulis".

Which makes *Thrones* sound simple. But as time spent on set makes all too clear, it's not. Even the lead writers start every day with a little orientation session.

Bryan Cogman: "Most of the conversations are, okay, where are we? Which scene is this? Even today, Dave and I were like, okay so Arya's here, the next scene she does this. Yeah, you have to sort of piece through it. Thankfully we have it all outlined pretty well."

So, to those outlines. Series four ended with Arya getting the slow boat to Braavos, hoping to find J'aqen. In series five she's got there, and she visits the House of Black and White, home of the Faceless Men. The presence of Tom Wlaschiha on set very much suggests that she's found her man, and it would be a surprise if she didn't – the Arya/J'aqen scenes were some of the strongest in series two. Cogman says that bringing Wlaschiha back was an easy call.

"When we started scripting the House of Black and White, it seemed like the natural thing – to have her brought into this world with the representative that we've already met from this world. They have a shared history together, and it gives the scenes an added kind of dramatic weight."



What will Cersei and Jaime get up to now their dad's out of the picture?

Tormund, a beard, sorry, a *leader* among men.

Will Varys and Tyrion become BFFs this year?

Areo Hotah gets to grips with his axe and Ellaria Sand.

On the rocks: Podrick and Brienne of Tarth.

Fans have been calling for J'aqen's return ever since that dramatic departure in the second season. But fans' clamour doesn't get to make the call, says Cogman.

"Ultimately, David and Dan [Benioff and Weiss] want to tell the story that they want to tell, based on George's world. We're certainly aware of the fan feedback, but we never say, 'Oh, we'd better do this because people have asked for it.' We have to trust our instincts."

STRANGE TIMES

Arya's Braavosian odyssey is just one part of what Cogman and Hill call this series' overriding theme:

"If there's kind of one common denominator for all the characters this season," says Hill, "it's that most of our protagonists find themselves as strangers in a strange land.

"Sometimes, they're thrust into a situation where they have to behave and interact in ways they never had before, which was tremendously gratifying and exciting for us as writers."

Example: Cersei Lannister's (Lena Headey) plotline is one of the standouts of series five, even though she remains in King's Landing, the place with which the majority of *Thrones* fans are most familiar. For the first time she meets the city's poor, served by a religious leader called High Sparrow, played by Jonathan Pryce, the announcement of whose casting was met with whoops of joy at Comic-Con last year.

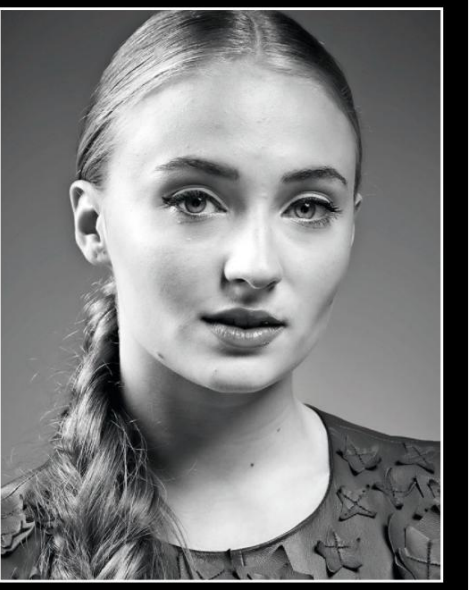
But much of this year's story will be about venturing abroad. Braavos, "a labyrinth of illusion and deceit", as Ser Jorah called it, is one strange land we have only visited via the interior of the Iron Bank, when Ser Davos went to raise money for an army last term. This time we will spend much more time there, visiting the House of Black and White, meeting the Faceless Men and encountering more Braavosi, seafarers and swordsmen.

The main other "strange land" the series ↔

"We're aware of fan feedback, but we never say, 'Oh, we'd better do this because people have asked for it.' We have to trust our instincts"

"SHE'S THE KEY TO THE NORTH!"

SOPHIE TURNER IS SANSA



Where do we find Sansa at the beginning of season five?

At the end of season four we saw her just about to go on a tour of the Vale so that's where she's popping off to. There's more of an emotional journey to it as well – she's really escaping from her Stark and Tully roots and she's just becoming her own house, her own person. She's also forming a little duo with Littlefinger [Aidan Gillen]. For the first time in her life she has a little bit of power over someone – he's not going to want to kill her, is he? She's the key to the North.

That's quite a turnaround for the girl who was always being manipulated by everyone else...

The past four seasons she's always been very down in the dumps, suffering at the hands of everyone else. I mean she always manipulated herself too, but it was very much wearing the façade of this vulnerable young girl. Now she can pull strings out in the open. She's like a force to be reckoned with.

How did you feel when you first saw Sansa version two, with the dark hair and the dark outfit?

It was amazing. Previously she was just so downtrodden all the time. Then I finally put on this costume – and it fits her perfectly, she's made it herself and she's proud to be wearing it. All in all it gave me a lot of power.

What can you tell us about the new season of *Game Of Thrones*?

Hmm. I have to be careful! But Sansa sees a few familiar faces. There's a big shock and she goes through a lot of hardships this season. But she approaches them very differently because of this whole new mentality that she has.

Benji Wilson

GETTY (1)

will visit is the sun-swept sybarite's paradise of Dorne, home of the Martells. One of the most memorable scenes of last series was the "Viper" Oberyn having his eyeballs dealt with like soft boiled eggs by the Lannister champion Gregor Clegane, aka the Mountain. This series Oberyn's brother and his daughters, the "Sand Snakes", will be out for revenge. Dorne has been filmed in Seville and Osuna, Spain.

"Oberyn Martell and Pedro Pacal, and Indira Varma as Ellaria Sand, were both so successful last year," says Hill. "They really whetted our appetite, and I think a lot of viewers' appetites, to see more of that world."

Tyrion too, is off on his own, whisked across the Narrow Sea with Varys after doing away with his own father on the dunny. A trailer has revealed him emerging from a crate, heavily bearded and confused and very much on his own. He will meet up with another banished character and form an uneasy alliance.

And photographs suggest that we will travel to the Free City of Valantis to the east in Essos, famed for a giant bridge. Cordoba in Spain, which has a famous Roman bridge, stood in for Volantis. Needless to say, Cogman will not be drawn, except to say, "I know it's leaked, I don't know whether it's confirmed, so I probably shouldn't comment. I think it's safe to say we're seeing more of the east than we've seen before."

George RR Martin has not written an episode this year, for the first time, but Cogman says we should read nothing into that.

"He reads the outline every year, and gives us notes and thoughts. This year he didn't write an episode, because he's hard at work on the next book."

> "George RR Martin didn't write an episode this year, because he's hard at work on the next book"

MORE THAN FANTASY

It's easy to forget that Martin's first *A Song Of Ice And Fire* book was published 20 years ago. It's a mammoth undertaking that, in conjunction with the TV show, has changed how fantasy is perceived.

"As the books have done," says Dave Hill, "I think the show has gradually gotten fans who may not realise they love the fantasy elements into the fantasy elements – my parents being an example. I think there are people that really got into the first season because of the political intrigue and the family drama, and certainly that's still, for me, the spine and the backbone of the whole thing. But those people all still love the dragons, they love the 700-foot wall, they love the shadow baby."

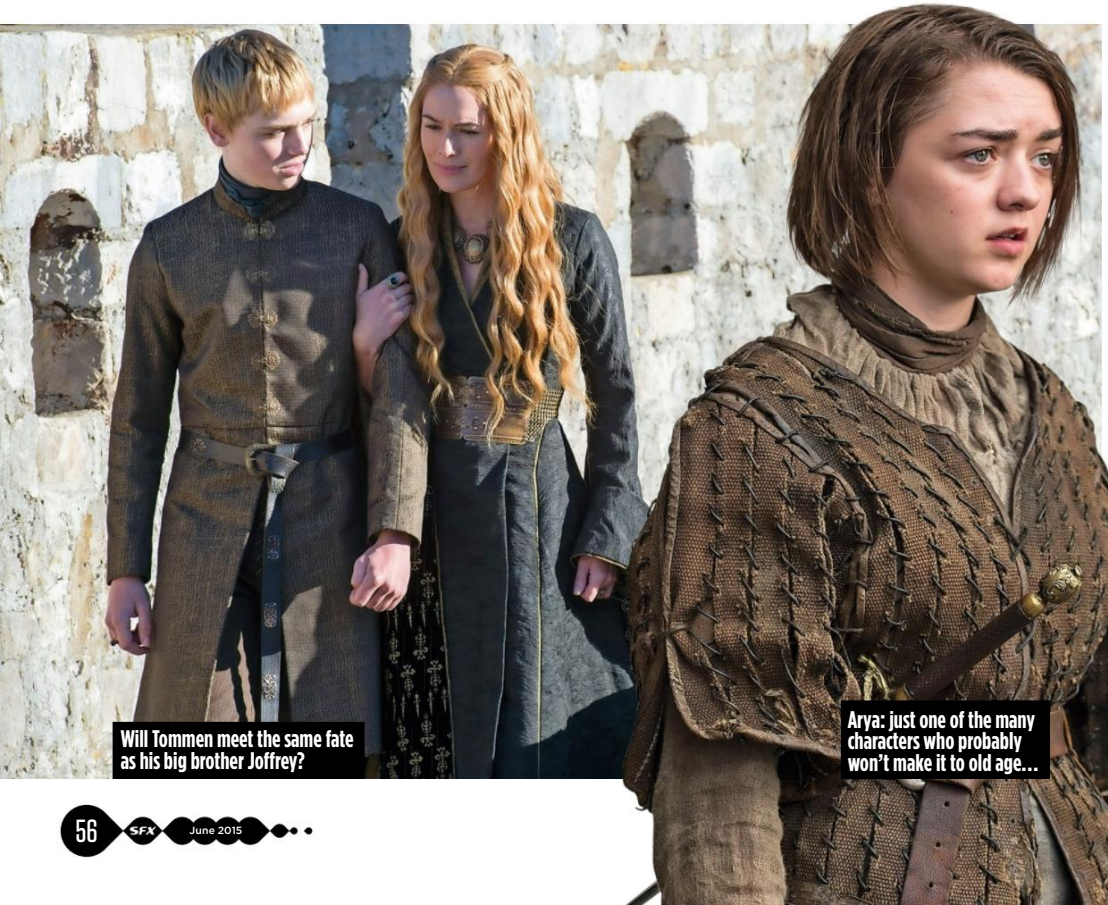
And that means that *Game Of Thrones* has made its own licence to unleash more fantasy in season five than ever before.

"I think we've acclimated people to those elements," says Hill. "Introducing them in a bigger way into the series now isn't going to throw most viewers. This season will be bigger – not just in size but in scope." SFX

Game Of Thrones is on Sky Atlantic from Monday 13 April.

Melisandre worships a fire god – and lights your cigarettes.

Missandei must be happier with her name than Grey Worm is of his.



Will Tommen meet the same fate as his big brother Joffrey?

Arya: just one of the many characters who probably won't make it to old age...

Daenerys's clothes are a long way from being rags.

Sansa and Littlefinger do good Scottish Widows.

GAME OF FROCKS

Costume Designer Michele Clapton dresses the Seven Kingdoms...

How do you prepare for each new season of *Game Of Thrones*?

It's all about the research. Me and my team look at how different people lived in different climates and times, at the availability of colours and fabrics that would be available, and at the techniques available. I then make a series of boards representing the different areas of Westeros so as to be careful to define them.

Do the costumes have to be specially made?

Armour and costume are 99 percent made in-house, and we have a wonderful range of artisans: leather workers, dyers, metal workers, cutters, printers and embroiderers, all with me in Belfast. All costumes are aged — be it a little sweat or down to full-on rags — and it is one of the most important aspects in the costume department. We have a team of approximately ten people including painters and textile artists whose job it is to age the costumes appropriately.

Are the clothes purely practical or do they have something to say?

Margaery even pulls off brown so well.

I love to try and indicate the emotional state of characters through their costumes, and also to indicate their influence over other characters and courts. Sometimes this can say so much more than words...

Benji Wilson

"THEY COULDN'T POSSIBLY MAKE IT ANY DARKER!"

ALFIE ALLEN IS THEON/REEK

How do things begin for Theon/Reek in season five?

He's alone – as usual – sleeping with the dogs. It becomes apparent pretty early on that he's in a place we know well. And to be clear, they like to keep it very real so I really was down there with the dogs. It was very dirty and smelly.

And how do things progress?

You're kind of going to see – which seems to be a running theme with season five – characters cross paths and interact with each other that you've never seen or would never even expect to see.

Mentally is he Theon or is he Reek?

I guess mentally there's been touches of Theon returning in season four. For me when he heard that Robb Stark has gone is sort of like when maybe he allows himself to even go back to that part of his brain. Then I think in season five something happens that makes him think enough is enough. I think he's allowing that part of his brain to reactivate itself a little bit more.

Will you miss being alone in a dungeon with Ramsay Snow doling out some physical and mental abuse?

I think I'll miss the intensity of those scenes, but to be able to sort of go back into the wide world of potentially turning back into Theon is exciting to me. But having gone through season five wherever they took it I would just be really, really excited because they couldn't possibly make it any darker!

Benji Wilson

REX (1)

DEVIL'S DUE

As the Man Without Fear swings on to screens for Marvel's *Daredevil* TV series, Josh Winning talks suits, scraps and scares with star Charlie Cox

Expect the series to start off in the manner of a gritty crime drama.

FORGET LEAPING FROM TALL buildings and pummelling cigar-chomping criminals. Charlie Cox got a taste of just how dangerous it can be to play a vigilante superhero during filming of an epic scrap on Marvel's new *Daredevil* TV show.

"I almost broke my finger!" the actor laughs, chatting amiably to *SFX* in a cosy London hotel that's roughly 3,500 miles away from New York's Hell's Kitchen. "I went to punch this guy and I smacked the pole right in front of him. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone!"

Okay, so it's not Batman's Bane back-crack, but you can understand Cox wanting to keep his injury on the down low given he's the new Man Without Fear. Shouldering the unenviable responsibility of rebooting *Daredevil* after Ben Affleck's divisive 2003 movie, Cox is also first out of the stalls as Marvel TV unleashes a super-team's worth of new heroes on Netflix. The on-demand service struck a deal in 2013 to produce four 13-episode shows – individually headlined by ground-level heroes Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage and Iron Fist – that will eventually climax with the quartet bumping fists for miniseries *The Defenders*.

It's a cross-media mutation of Marvel's tried and true *Avengers* formula, this time putting the studio's more real-world-y heroes up front and centre, with a projected team-up planned for some time in the near future. "That's the plan," Cox confirms. "I remember [Marvel TV boss] Jeph Loeb telling me about when he was at the *Avengers* premiere in New York. As he was walking in, he thought, 'Ten blocks from here, that's where the Defenders would be right now. Just hanging out. Street-level crime... That would be cool.'"

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. While *Defenders* will happen eventually ("I can't wait! I hope it's sooner rather than later," Cox enthuses), all eyes are currently on *Daredevil*. Oveseen by *Angel*, *Smallville* and *Spartacus* producer Steven S DeKnight, it's being touted as a grittier take on the Marvel universe that cleaves to the stories of comic greats Frank Miller and Brian Michael Bendis.

"It's certainly geared towards a slightly older audience," Cox nods, bright-eyed on this inappropriately sunny March morning, and clearly having the time of his life aboard the Marvel train. "*Daredevil* seems to be more compelling when it's got slightly more adult themes. When I think about the show, there's something very lonely about it; all of the characters are lonely, ashamed or scared."

Charlie Cox stars as the blind lawyer with the lively brief.

If that sounds adult, it's probably because it is. Early *Daredevil* footage has pitched it as Marvel meets *The Wire*, which should please fans of Miller's brutal, crime-saga '80s comics, and there's not a superpower in sight (aside from our hero's "radar" vision). Originally masterminded by *Cabin In The Woods* director Drew Goddard, the show retcons Affleck's outing and reintroduces blind lawyer Matt Murdock as he goes up against real-life baddies in Hell's Kitchen, New York – rather than, say, horny gods with dubious invasion tactics.

Though Goddard eventually departed *Daredevil* to work on the upcoming new *Spider-Man* movie (remaining attached as the show's consulting producer, with DeKnight now showrunner), his vision for the series stands. Think brutal. Think bloody. Think Alex Maleev panels brought to pitch-black life. "When I read the first few scripts, I thought, 'These are cool. It's unlike anything I've seen Marvel do before,'" Cox reveals. ↬

Rosario Dawson co-stars as Claire Temple, a character from '70s *Luke Cage* comics.

First auditioning in March 2014, the 32-year-old actor admits he's "not an obvious choice for something like *Daredevil*". Chatty and easy-going, and still best-known for 2007 fantasy *Stardust* and *Boardwalk Empire*, he's your typical unassuming Brit. Beneath his chequered shirt, though, there's a ripple of muscle that hints at the hard labour he endured to bring Daredevil back to life.

LIMBERING UP

Landing the role in May 2014, Cox had just one month to hit the gym and "read, read, read" before cameras rolled in New York. On the comics front, he name-checks Miller's celebrated '80s and '90s runs – including *The Man Without Fear* – before revealing: "I really kind of settled in the 1998 era onwards, the Bendis/Maleev era. I felt like that suited the show I'd read. I read the scripts and I looked at those comics and thought, 'They seem to fit in nicely with each other.'"

Perhaps the biggest sign that Cox was perfect for the role of Daredevil? He was unafraid of sitting through the Affleck movie. "I'd heard so many different things about it," he says. "I happen to think Ben Affleck did a wonderful job; he was a great Daredevil. But it was very evident as soon as I put it on that we were doing something very, very different."

You don't become a crime-fighting superhero without a bit of training…

That couldn't be more true. With 13 hours' worth of TV to play with, the DeKnight/Cox *Daredevil* is an atmospheric slow-burner that cherry-picks choice moments from the comics while adding its own dark wrinkles. Gone is the quippy devil of Karl Kesel and Joe Kelly's guard (even before them, Daredevil's '60s adventures landed him the moniker "the sightless swashbuckler"). This new *Daredevil* is a brooding saga that journeys with Murdock through the dark heart of Hell's Kitchen as he establishes himself as both a lawyer and a hero. "This first series is really the evolution of Matt to Daredevil," Cox reveals. "It's a much longer build and that's one of the benefits we have of having all this time – and hopefully future series."

Like all origin stories, it's a rough ride, not least on the physical side of things. While the comics have seen Daredevil besting both Wolverine *and* the Punisher in battle, the show finds him embroiled in even scuzzier scraps, including tackling a kidnapper's den in breathtaking *Oldboy* style for that scene in which Cox injured his finger. "I love that stuff," Cox says, shrugging off the injury. "For me, any of the physical stuff they'll let me do, I'll do. The great thing about Daredevil is, because he doesn't have any super-powers, I was able to do quite a lot of it."

Things are tougher still on the emotional side. Murdock makes plenty of mistakes ("He takes things too far at times, and other times he makes the wrong decision," Cox says), and as he's dragged further into the dark underbelly of Hell's Kitchen, his only anchors to the real world are co-workers Foggy (Elden Henson) and Karen (Deborah Ann Woll). "You can't make a *Daredevil* show without either of them," Cox acknowledges, but if you think you know where those characters are headed, think again. "The show is not a foregone conclusion," the actor teases, "and I'm really excited for that."

Further complicating Murdock's life is crime boss Wilson Fisk, aka Kingpin. Introduced in Miller's comics as Daredevil's arch enemy (though he originally turned up in early *Spider-Man* stories), Vincent D'Onofrio plays him with cold-eyed menace in the series, somehow channelling both Tony Soprano and Hannibal Lecter. And while his game plan remains murky at best, it's reasonable to assume he's going to be a considerable thorn in Daredevil's side.

"It wasn't difficult to be intimidated by him!" Cox laughs. "There's a few characters in cinema history who have really terrified me: Sir Ben Kingsley in *Sexy Beast* or Begbie in *Trainspotting*. I think Kingpin may be added to that list when you see the show."

DRESSED TO THRILL

Which brings us to perhaps the most important part of the series: Daredevil's iconic suit. In early episodes, Murdock wears the black get-up comic fans will recognise from Miller's *Man Without Fear*. While Cox is keeping shtum about what the final

Daredevil costume looks like, he does reveal that the show took inspiration from Chris Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy when it came to unpacking just why a regular guy decides to dress up to fight crime.

"There's a practical element to it, there's a reason for it," Cox says. "He gets hurt and he has to get extra padding and all that kind of stuff. They found a balance between paying reverence to the suit, and having the iconic suit that you need, but also tackling the functionality and the reason behind it. Why it looks the way it does, why it's made the way it is. And the reason someone chooses to wear a superhero suit, what is that reason? We discussed that. It's very rarely discussed, and it's great."

It's clear that DeKnight and Cox have great ambitions for their *Daredevil*. And with the horned one back in the Marvel fold after Twentieth Century Fox's rights to the character expired back in October 2012, there's also the possibility of expanding beyond the small screen. Because, yes, this Daredevil is 100% compatible with the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

"Marvel are incredibly particular about that," Cox says. "There's a guy on set whose job is to be the eyes and ears of Marvel. The fans love this interwoven universe. There are comics where Daredevil and Spider-Man are mates, or Daredevil gets with the Defenders – and then there are comics that are just about Daredevil, which is closer to what our show is for now. But there are Easter Eggs, and that's exciting!" Cue scenes in which *Daredevil*'s antagonists discuss capitalising on the destruction wrought on the Big Apple in *Avengers Assemble*. "What a great idea!" Cox enthuses. "Nobody ever thinks about that. That's a very sophisticated thought to have."

So while another season for the horned avenger won't be considered until Netflix cranks the numbers on the first, there's always the possibility of Daredevil eventually joining the Avengers on the big screen. "I would love that!" Cox grins. "No one has had any conversation with me about that, so I'd hate to presume, but that would be a great privilege and joy. I mean, it'd be fucking cool!" SFX

***Daredevil* is on Netflix from 10 April.**

FOE SELECTA

Kingpin's a key player in *Daredevil* season one, but which other comic villains could stop by the show?

BULLSEYE

Obviously. He won't show up in *Daredevil*'s first season (no doubt because we're still suffering from Colin Farrell flashbacks), but he'll have to crop up eventually. A homicidal maniac who has hallucinations thanks to a nasty brain tumour, he's basically the Joker of the Marvel-verse and Kingpin's chief assassin.

TYPHOID MARY

No superhero is complete without a tortured romance, and Daredevil's had his share. One of his most notable was this telekinetic trouble-maker, originally hired by Kingpin to assassinate Daredevil. Mary briefly falls in love with the tortured do-gooder, only to ditch him for, uh, Kingpin. Make up your mind, love.

MISTER FEAR

A black-cowled menace who's repeatedly caused trouble for Daredevil, Mister Fear was originally one of Murdock's law classmates. He pitches up later as a drug pusher whose product transforms people into suicidal psychotics. When he gives the drug to Murdock's wife, Mister Fear makes things even more personal. Yeah, dark.

THE HAND

He's named after a body part (ooo, scary), but the Hand is actually one of the biggest players in the Marvel-verse. Created by Frank Miller, he's the leader of a deadly group of ninja assassins who trade in sorcery so potent they can cheat death. Though the Hand appeared in *Elektra* (2005), he's definitely due a redo.

OWL

Though initially sort of a lame super-villain when he was introduced in the '60s (his power: uh, gliding short distances), Owl later became an insidious and deceptive villain who, at one point, ruled New York's criminal underworld – and even got Kingpin himself charged with murder. He's a hoot a minute.

BACK IN BACK IN BACK

BLACK BLACK IN BLACK

Two goes into three in the new season of *ORPHAN BLACK*, Joseph McCabe discovers

WITH SKY-HIGH RATINGS, a global following and universal praise for its wildly versatile lead actress Tatiana Maslany, you'd be excused for thinking *Orphan Black* creators Graeme Manson and John Fawcett are slowing down to enjoy the fruits of their labours, making things easier for themselves as they enter the third season of their hit show. Alas, sighs Manson, you would be wrong.

"For the writers it didn't get any easier," the executive producer tells *SFX* of year three. "It's a very serialised show. We chew up a lot of story every episode. Because our pace is really fast and we like twists and turns. To keep that pace up, we have to go through a lot of story. Keeping all that grounded and as the world expands – and this is very important to us – keeping it centred on the 'clone triangle' of Sarah, Cosima and Allison, with Sarah as the leader tracking down this vast mystery and getting closer and closer to her own story... It's a challenge to keep that at the centre when there's a lot of other threats going on on the outside that are awesome and could threaten to distract us."

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"WE HAVE A LOT OF HARD SCIENCE FOR SCIENCE GEEKS WHO LIKE THE SHOW"

She'd had better days.

This year those threats take the shape of the male cloning initiative Project Castor, the members of which are played by Ari Millen.

"I would say that the Castor side of things is our main antagonist force that is aligning against us," explains Manson, having just completed work on the season finale. "Ari Millen's done a terrific job in the third season, and we've really enjoyed giving him these characters to work with. They're quite different from our female characters, who grew up in Project Leda in this kind of social engineering experiment, where their individualism was almost encouraged. Whereas the characters he plays, such as Mark Rollins and Rudy, were raised in more of a military academy environment. So they're less distinct, they're less individualised, and they've been brainwashed together in that sort of military consciousness. That us-versus-them consciousness. So it's a different spectrum that he's playing with. It's not as broad, I suppose, as Tatiana's, but no less challenging. Because he's still got to delineate these characters... Now, one of them, Mark, we know quite well from the first season; and we know that character had something that he was struggling with. But a character like Rudy..."

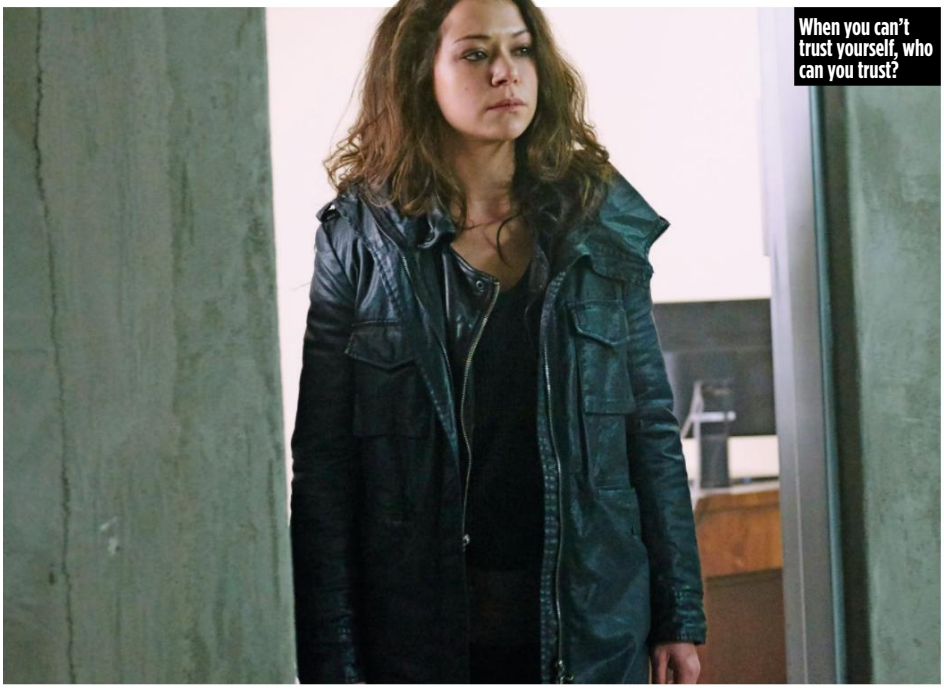
Manson laughs. "We're really enjoying a villainous villain."

In the face of such villainy, and with Sarah's crazed sister Helena now in the hands of the military (thanks to Mrs S), Manson tells *SFX* the issue of trust is one of season three's primary concerns. "I think that sort of boils down to 'We are stronger together,'" he says, "which is one of the real themes of this season."

BETTER TOGETHER

The meaning of "together" changes frequently in the world of *Orphan Black*; and the latest clone to join the ranks of Sarah and her sisters is by far the youngest. The same age, in fact, as Sarah's daughter Kira. Does the issue of cloning children hit home more strongly than ever through the introduction of Charlotte?

"Yeah," Manson replies. "I mean, it's some very interesting territory, and we found a terrific little actress in the girl who plays Charlotte. But there's also the practicality of shooting with kids. It's difficult to shoot with kids, because they just can't work the hours. So you have to be careful of just how much story you give them. With our kids, with Charlotte and Kira, I think the best thing we can say is we're playing a long game with them. And they don't need to play that heavily in our crazy run-and-gun world of *Orphan Black* to be important."


When you can't trust yourself, who can you trust?

As for the abilities Kira has demonstrated – which include healing quickly and distinguishing her mother's clones – Manson says they too will be explained over time.

"Each season ends in many, many questions. We don't feel like we have to come back the next season and answer all of those questions. We are looking at it as a series structure and not just a season structure, and not just an episode structure. So those are great questions that are bound to be answered some day."

Since Sarah's sister Cosima, whose life is threatened by a disease, is a favourite of *Orphan Black* fans, we ask Manson if we'll learn her fate this year.

"Her life is hanging in the balance. But in the way that we approach science in *Orphan Black*... First of all, if you look at the show over the course of two, and now three seasons, how much time has gone by, it's like a month and a half of something. So in reality, with a disease, an autoimmune disorder like she's facing, it can be a long journey of ups and downs. The science takes a while to develop. Gene therapy can be hit and miss. I think that's something very realistic about that. It's not gonna be clean. It's gonna be messy. She has a terminal illness. It's not like it ever goes away or leaves her mind. It's always with her, and it's always with us. But much like she's not defined by her sexuality, the character's not defined by her illness either. And she wants to face it bravely and on her own terms and not be a martyr and just not be defined by that herself. That's a long way of saying her illness, like her sexuality, is not the most interesting thing about her."

Regarding Sarah's less sympathetic sister, the no-nonsense Rachel, fans were left wondering if she was even alive after her eye was gouged out at the end of the season. Manson confirms with wicked glee that "Rachel is gonna have to struggle this year. It's kind of delicious to see that very poised ice queen have her dignity taken away from her."

SIX OF ONE

With so many of *Orphan Black*'s players already on its chess board, *SFX* asks Manson if viewers' continued craving for new clones factors into his storytelling.

"It's a balance. Myself and John and Tatiana, we know how much fun it is to meet a new clone, and our fans love it so we really want to do that again this year. I don't want to tease that too much, but we're pretty excited about it. But on the other hand, we don't do random clones very much. We like them to mean something. So we don't introduce them lightly. On top of that we have a complex story, with a lot of threads. We don't want to keep adding threads without tying a few of them off. They don't all need to get introduced and tied up in one season. So chances are, if a thread comes up, if we've touched on something in season one, we'll probably try and incorporate

We'll start to see more of the male clones this series.

SELFIES!

The Top 5 Craziest Clone Stories in SF

"THE ENEMY WITHIN"

Ol' James Tiberius Kirk himself was the victim of an unintentional cloning project in this classic *Star Trek* episode (written by grandmaster Richard Matheson). Split by a transporter malfunction into identical twins – one good, one bad – the Captain realises he can only lead his crew by recombining the two.

THE MULTIPLE MAN

Marvel mutant Jamie Madrox (created by writers Len Wein and Chris Claremont and artist John Buscema) was born with the ability to create "dupes" of himself. A power that came in handy when we joined the ranks of X-Factor and fought alongside the X-Men.

WHERE LATE THE SWEET BIRDS SANG

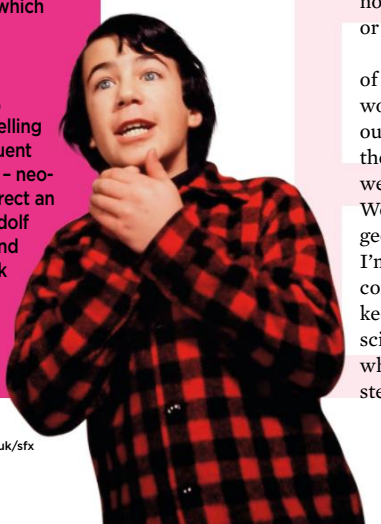
Kate Wilhelm's Hugo Award-winning novel concerns a society rendered sterile due to pollution and disease. In an attempt to restart its breeding ability, it clones itself – but learns too late that its "children" are happier with cloning than sexual reproduction, eventually costing them their ability to innovate.

"WHEN YOU CARE YOU LOVE"

Theodore Sturgeon's moving short story – the beginning of an unfinished novel – is about a wealthy widow who resurrects her late husband by cloning one of the very cancer cells that killed him, and then placing herself in suspended animation until he reaches the age at which he left her.

THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL

In Ira Levin's bestselling novel – and its subsequent film adaptation (right) – neo-Nazis attempt to resurrect an army of clones from Adolf Hitler's DNA, only to find that it's nurture (or lack thereof) and not nature that created the would-be world conqueror.



KOBAL (1)

it as we go. We try and stay flexible that way. But it's nice to be in a season now, season three – and going into season four, for us writing – where we feel we have a mythology that we can tell the story from, and not just generate story by run-and-jump-and-plot."

After three years, Manson remains surprised that his show has captured the imaginations of so many fans, given that it's not set in the distant future, on another planet, or in a world of metahumans.

"I find it really cool," says the producer of the ever-swelling ranks of "clone clubs" worldwide. "I'm always very encouraged by our fans, because so many fans respond to the intelligent, the higher aspects of what we're trying to do, thematically, in writing. We have a lot of hard science for science geeks who like the show. And that's fabulous. I'm not a scientist, but we use our science consultant frequently; and we just try and keep our science one step over the line into science fiction. We like to know exactly what the science is, and then take it that one step further."

"Not only that," Manson points out. "We're slowly presenting a view of science that's a nexus of some very pragmatic and practical things in our world, that are of practical science these days. That is a sort of nexus of private enterprise, military, mass wealth and patents [...] In that sense, science becomes politics. We always try and look at it from that perspective. And we're always reminded by our science consultant that science is what scientists do. So what are the forces pushing discovery? And in which directions? You can jump off into science fiction there, because that's the starting point. Because that feels like the real world. It's not very often that science is depicted that way, depicted as politics."

But no matter the science or the politics, the creator adds, "We just have to remember whose story it is, that it is the girls' story. And when that journey is rewarding each season, that's when we know it's working, despite how hard it is for all the writers." SFX

***Orphan Black* is on BBC America from 18 April, and BBC Three in the UK, date TBC.**

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Jada Pinkett Smith

Meet Gotham's most conniving and ambitious citizen, Fish Mooney...

WORDS BY TARA BENNETT ● PORTRAIT BY CHRISTOPHER POLK

Given all the hype surrounding *Gotham*'s use of classic Batman comics characters, it's ironic that the completely original character of Fish Mooney has garnered so much attention and critical heat. The blame lies squarely at the exquisitely high-heeled toes of Jada Pinkett Smith who plays the ambitious mobstress with electrifying gusto. Depending on her mood, Mooney can be colourful and comedic, or edgy and driven. While shrewd, her impulses always keep her on the precipice of disaster as we've seen in her banishment via former crime boss mentor Don Carmine Falcone. She's now on a slow climb to overtake his empire, a career trajectory that's been wickedly enjoyable to watch. *SFX* grilled her about what makes Fish such a player in that city called Gotham...

Since Fish Mooney has the luxury of existing outside of comics canon, how would you describe her?

I see Fish Mooney as an extreme version of a woman; a woman who wears many faces. A woman who is strong, but yet afraid. This is a woman who, because of her background and because of who she really is, has taken it upon herself to do a lot of cover-up. So, I think she has all of these different kinds of personalities that she picks and chooses to use during certain times.

What are they?

You have this sophisticated Fish, or what she considers a sophisticated woman sounds like and looks like. But then, there are times when she loses her cool and you see her original essence, which can get a little gutter. Then sometimes when she has to be influential with men, you'll see her put on her little, sexy kitten voice. This is a woman who has created all of these different masks to fit different times.

Have you had a lot of say in how she's evolved?

Yeah. I think one of the reasons why the role was so interesting to me was because Bruno [Heller, showrunner] really wanted a partner in creating this Fish Mooney character, and I love female gangsters. I just love them. I think that they're really interesting characters and interesting people. There's one, Griselda Blanco [the notorious Medellin Cartel drug lord], who I had studied, and I also love the character [Norma Desmond] from *Sunset Boulevard*. I was like, I would really love to do a mixture of these two women, because the one thing I love about the supervillains, and *Gotham*, is that they're always so colourful. I really wanted her to be grounded, but also have quite a flair.

"She's an extreme version of a woman; she's a woman who wears many faces"

On-screen, you seem very comfortable in Fish's skin. Did that character confidence come easily?

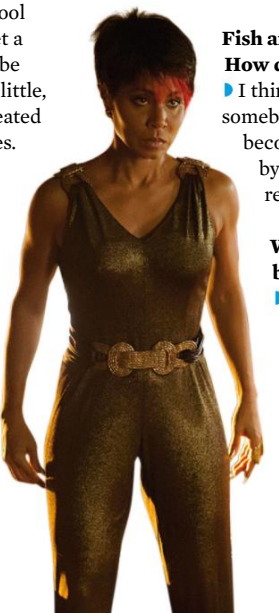
Funnily enough, it really feels like as soon as I put on that wig, Fish is there. I put on that wig and her gear, because it's so specifically her, and it's an immediate transformation. The first day, as soon as I put on that wig and that dress, I just felt like, "Oh, there she is!" And every time I do it, she just arrives. It's a really beautiful thing to have as an actress. You just don't have to work hard for it and that I'm grateful for. That wig, and those heels, and the nails really conjure her.

Your character often seems on the knife edge of being arch. Are you always aware of that?

As I was saying before, I love how colourful Fish can be, but at the same time, you still want her to be relatable. You know what I mean? You still want people to be able to look at this woman and while they might not necessarily know her story, be able to relate to her. I think that in this world of Gotham, sometimes finding where you need to be emotionally, or how grounded you need to be in a scene, or how far you can actually go with the colour sometimes tends to be a bit challenging. It's a see-saw. It's always trying to find that balance.

What about the city of Gotham itself. Is this an intriguing world to you as a person?

Oh, yes. Gotham is so mysterious. There's this undertone to Gotham, the idea that this city itself is kind of this underbelly and it's just like, what is going in these alleys? What's going on in these so-called high rises? What is happening? Why is it that this place has some of the most incredible villains and then you have one of the most beloved superheroes?



Fish and Cobblepot have had quite the reversal this season. How does Fish view his machinations?

I think she saw Penguin as one of her adopted orphans; somebody that she took off the street and helped them become something. So, I think that she felt deeply betrayed by Penguin. It will be interesting to see where their relationship goes from here.

What's most surprising about what's to come for Fish by season's end?

I think you're going to see a lot more colour from Fish in the next episodes to come. You're going to see a lot more vulnerability, a lot more of a human side of Fish Mooney. You've seen the ruthless, now you're going to see some heart. SFX

Gotham is shown on Fox in the US, and in the UK on Channel 5 on Monday nights.

BIODATA

- **OCCUPATION:** Actress/Producer
- **BORN:** 18 September 1971
- **FROM:** Baltimore, Maryland
- **GREATEST HITS:** *A Different World, The Secret Life Of Bees, Hawthorne, After Earth, Gotham, Ali*
- **RANDOM FACT:** She started her own metal band, Wicked Wisdom, for which she is a songwriter and singer.

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ABSOLUTELY

FOLD AWAY THE PALM TREES, retract the tropical swimming pool and feel your pulse instinctively quicken. International Rescue is back.

"I've fallen in love with the classic series during the making of this," says Giles Ridge, executive producer of *Thunderbirds Are Go*, CITV's ambitious upgrade of the icon-laden original. "Just by virtue of the fact that you have to immerse yourself in this world. It's incredible how Gerry and Sylvia Anderson got it so right 50 years ago – a secret hideaway island, five young, aspirational brothers, rescuing people wherever they're in danger, and the most incredible fleet of craft that you could ever wish for. The series starts from a point of perfection. It's a pretty damn good DNA, really."

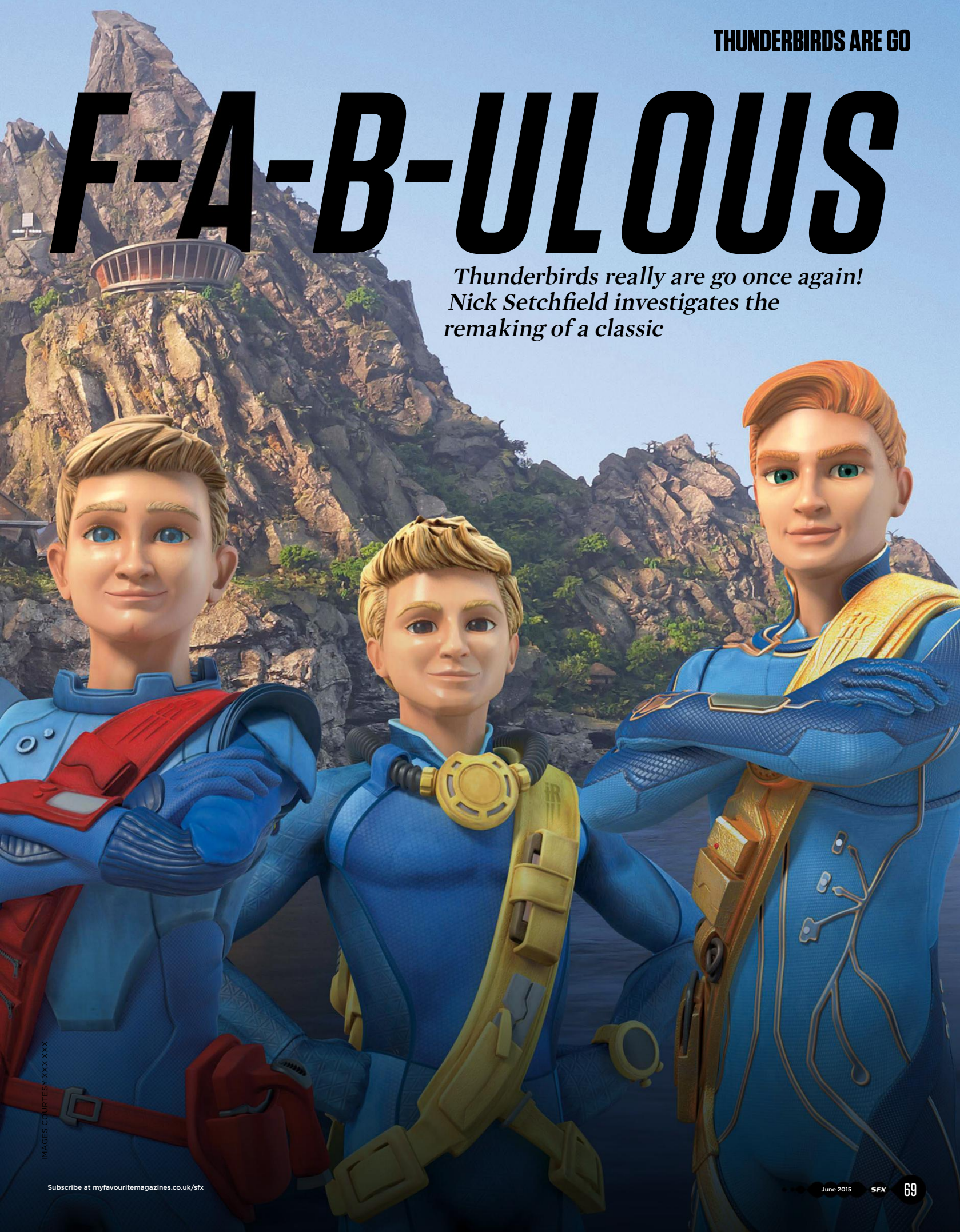
Glossy, spectacular and armed with enough charm to conquer generation after generation, *Thunderbirds* first launched in 1965, setting its tales of global derring-do a hundred years hence. Now, halfway closer to that shiny '60s dream of the future, Ridge tells *SFX* that this remake truly slings the show into the 21st century.

"When we set out to remake the series I was very clear that we didn't want to mess too much with the original. It has a lot of cultural relevance for a lot of people. What we needed to update were those elements that a child audience of today would expect. And so whilst we still tell stories that have heroism and selflessness at their heart we wanted to look at the visual aesthetic of the series, and move that on for a 21st century audience. We've talked to kids all the way through the development of this series – not just in the UK but we've gone to Japan, where *Thunderbirds* is huge, we've gone to the US – and one of the common bits of feedback was that we had moved on from the concept of marionette puppets. We love the classic series and all that the puppets gave, but it was time to explore something more modern, more cutting-edge."

Say goodbye to the bobble-headed heroics of Supermarionation. *Thunderbirds Are Go* ➔

F-A-B-ULOUS

Thunderbirds really are go once again! Nick Setchfield investigates the remaking of a classic



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Tracy Island: as small and verdant as ever.

"We wanted *Thunderbirds* to push the boundaries in terms of delivering a new aesthetic for kids"

M'LADY'S MAN

COR, STRIKE A LIGHT! DAVID GRAHAM IS BACK AS PARKER

So what's it been like playing Parker again?

It's been great. I never thought it would happen. Giles and Estelle [the producers] actually came up to see me. I think they were checking me out, after all this time, to see if I was still in one piece! I think they were suitably impressed and I'm absolutely delighted to recreate the character.

Was it easy to recapture Parker?

It's in my vocal DNA. Although I am old in age terms, my voice still has a young quality. It doesn't equal my age, my voice. I'm very glad about that. I never smoked, thank god! Everybody smoked when I was young, like chimneys!

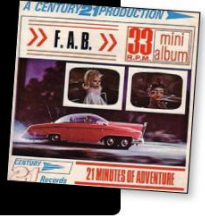
Do we see a different side to Parker? He looks a little more dangerous...

I think he's just his old self, his old, charming, villainous self... a reformed character. The relationship with Lady P is slightly changed but it's basically the same. When he might go off the rails she pulls him back on again.

What's it like working with Rosamund Pike as the new Lady Penelope?

Rosamund is lovely, very good, very professional. We just left off where we began, really, with her. I did see *Gone Girl* and she was great in it. I thought she was wonderful – the best thing in it!

Parker and Lady Penelope made a record in the '60s. Something you're keen to revisit? Maybe a 21st century remix?



Yes, I don't mind being in the charts... [showbiz voice] Show me the contract, I will show you the voice!

trades wood and string for pixels and code, conjuring its cast in sleek and snazzy CG form. Out go the oversized noggins, in comes anatomical correctness.

"They're more in human proportion. You're asking an audience to believe in and care for a character, so we felt that the character should be designed with more human proportions – which is what Gerry moved on to in his later series, because the servo technology moved on. When you get to *Captain Scarlet* the heads become much smaller, but the technology wasn't there in '65, and so you just had to have bigger heads."

The new series keeps an aesthetic connection to the old, though, fusing its digital heroes and hardware with the reality of live-action sets.

"It was about retaining what made *Thunderbirds* special in the first place but also being mindful that an audience of 2015 has a lot more media choices at its disposal," Ridge tells *SFX*. "We inevitably had to look at the competition in the market. There are many excellent action adventure series out there, but they're largely all produced in CG. They're beautifully made but we wanted *Thunderbirds* to push the boundaries in terms of delivering a new aesthetic for kids. And at the same time we also wanted to try and pay tribute to how Gerry and Sylvia made the original series. In New Zealand we met the wonderful talents at Weta workshop and Pukeko Pictures, the company founded by Peter Jackson and Richard Taylor. And we discovered that Richard took a lot of his inspiration as a child from *Thunderbirds* and that most of the designers and technicians and craftspeople in his workshop in Wellington are passionate about *Thunderbirds* as well. I felt I had found absolutely the right co-producer and partner to make the series."

FRESH APPROACH

Taylor and his crew perfected a technique that brings a cutting-edge visual style to the Tracy clan's new adventures. "We tested this mixed media approach of building our craft and our characters in traditional CG but having our world, our vistas, our buildings, all of those backgrounds, as much as possible as live-action miniature sets – which is absolutely Weta's forte on all those wonderful feature films. That, in its rawest form, gives beautiful background plates that are real. These are real models, albeit built at different scales. It gives us a foreground that is traditional CG and then layered on top of that are 2D effects, 3D

The makers have gone for fairly muted colours for the fleet, as per the original series.

Their heads may be smaller, but the Tracys are just as smart!

Rosamund Pike voices the new-look Lady Penelope.

effects, a layer of lighting, and when all that media comes to London it's all composited together to make a picture that looks unique and very beautiful.

"But even with the CG nothing is completely electronic. With Thunderbird 2, for example, we painted that iconic green onto a glass panel in the workshop, threw lots of dust and dirt at it to get that beautiful dirtied texture, and then we'd photograph that panel and scan that photograph around the digital model. So even a CG asset has something physical to its nature. We love the fact that it pays tribute to the handmade nature of Gerry and Sylvia's series. The original series pioneered a technique called kit-bashing, where you'd find bits and pieces around the home... That's absolutely the approach that we've brought to this series. Which is very British! It just adds another layer of originality and sophistication that I think kids will enjoy."

Telling "mostly brand new stories – though there's at least one remake of an iconic episode in there", *Thunderbirds Are Go* preserves much of the matchless iconography of the original series. Ridge says a contemporary spin ensures it's not simply a retro-fest. "From a design perspective we found it easy to mesh those iconic '60s elements with new. There's a bit of a fashion for it nowadays anyway. I think the trick was in getting the colour palette right, and ensuring that the world of colour within *Thunderbirds* wasn't stuck in the '60s but that there was sufficient panache and diversity in terms of the colours that made it feel modern and fresh."

Tweaks have been made to the mighty Thunderbird fleet. "We've made some minor adjustments. We've streamlined Thunderbird 2 in a small way. The sophistication, technically, of these vehicles is much greater than they were 50 years ago, but the test for us was that you should be able to look at a silhouette and immediately know which vehicle it was. I think with all the craft you can absolutely do that."

And yes, those heart-stirring Tracy Island launch sequences are present and correct. "Kids love mechanical process, so we have absolutely indulged that in the new series. We absolutely romance the launches. We spent a lot of time storyboarding them and just making sure that all the detail was there."

The show's voice cast includes *Gone Girl* star Rosamund Pike, an impeccable fit for International Rescue's trouble-seeking toff Lady Penelope.

"Rosamund always felt that she wanted to bring a modern interpretation to what is a very modern woman in our new series. I think it's right that the Lady Penelope of 2015 should be relevant to our audience. She's a young, independent-minded, intelligent woman, who celebrates the fashions and attitudes of now, rather than 1965."

NO LIGHTING UP

Naturally this thoroughly modern Penelope hasn't inherited her predecessor's elegant way with a cigarette.

"That's the whole reason why I doubt the classic series would ever be played in children's airtime again – there was smoking and there was drinking. That's lacking from our new series, but made up for in all sorts of other areas."

Not tempted to have her vaping, then? "No!" laughs Ridge.

The gaspers may be absent but this Penelope is still ferried in FAB 1 by the loyal Parker. Parker's so remarkably loyal that he's even voiced by David Graham, the man whose larynx brought the cockney chauffeur to life in the '60s show.

"I felt if there was one part that we could recreate completely loyally and accurately it was Parker. The thing about David's performance in our new series is that he sounds no different to how he was 50 years ago. He's exactly the same Parker, and he's been a delight to work with. He's embraced the changes that we feel we've been able to make."

Parker may have embraced the changes, but will the hardcore Anderson fanbase welcome this new take on a beloved Brit SF classic? The Tracy brood can face down everything from fires to floods but can they win the hearts of the purists?

"When ITV asked me to remake this series I was filled with a mixture of elation and huge apprehension," Ridge tells *SFX*. "I completely understand that there's a very loyal audience of the original who will look upon us very carefully. I really hope that we've found that right balance of offering a dynamic, cutting-edge series for youngsters but with the loyalty that we've brought to the look and feel of the original, and the values that made the original in the first place. Remakes are not easy, but I really hope that we have a wide audience that appreciates what we've done." SFX

Thunderbirds Are Go launches on CITV in April (exact date TBC).

CAR

After 30 years in the cinematic wilderness the man they called Max is back. Action maestro George Miller takes Jordan Farley for a trip down FURY ROAD

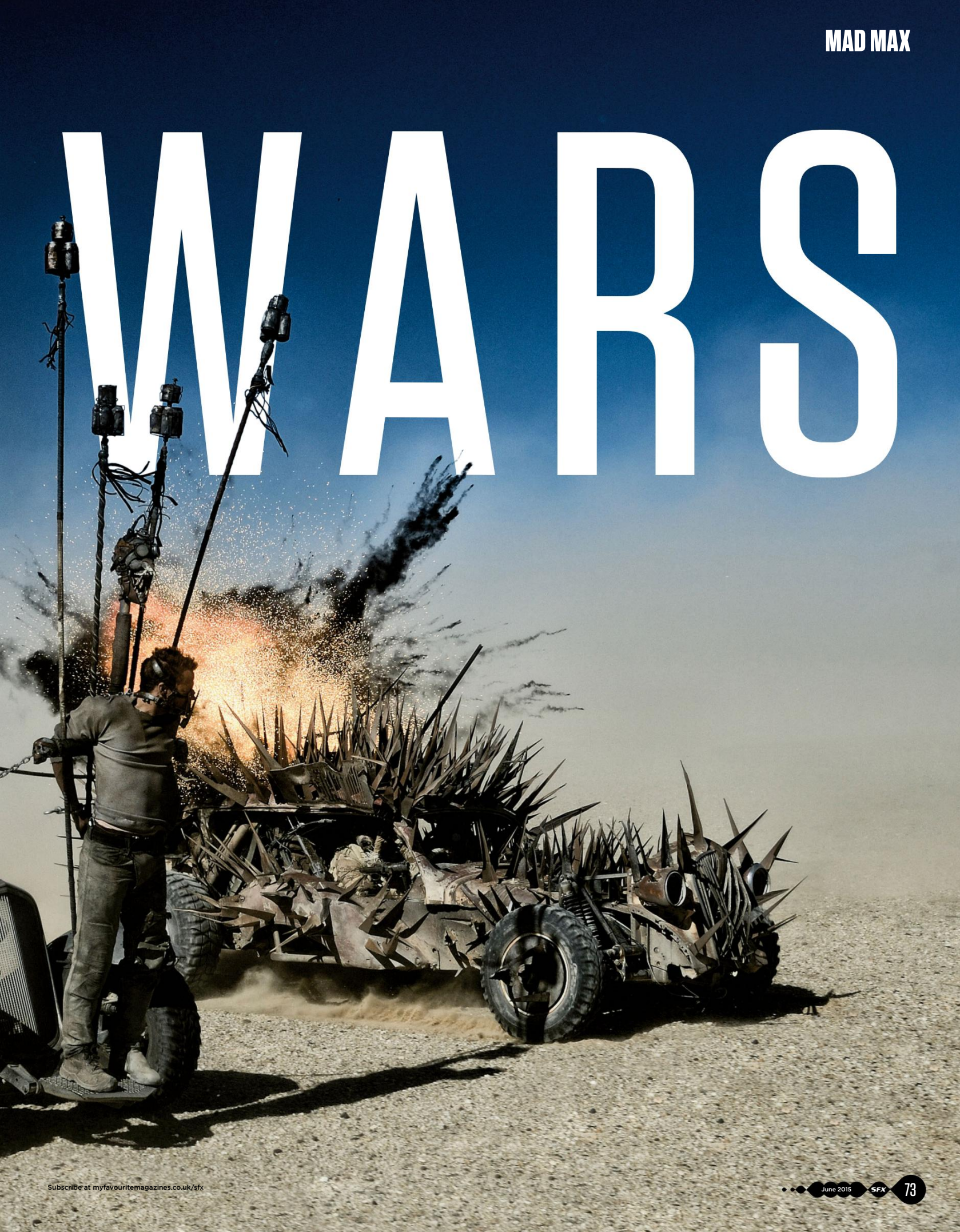
NO ONE MAKES ACTION movies like George Miller. Not any more.

In the biggest year for mega-budget cinematic spectacle since, well, ever, *Mad Max: Fury Road* has something even the *Age Of Ultron*s and *Force Awakens* of the world with their gargantuan CGI budgets can't offer – tangible auto-mechanical carnage.

"The film is different than anything else out there," Miller tells *SFX* down the line from his Sydney home. "We did everything old school because we didn't have to deal with flying humans or space vehicles; the subject matter allowed us to make it much more real. We could go and get a big truck and a couple of cars and smash them against each other, with actual people on them. So most of what you see is absolutely real, including Tom Hardy as Max dangling between the wheels of a monster truck – it's actually Tom, not his stunt double."

Appropriately enough for a series that deals in injection-fuelled chaos, the road back to the big screen has been remarkably bumpy. From two failed filming attempts to the public fall from grace of its original leading man, *Fury Road* has hit more brick walls than a crash test dummy. But for Miller, the film that will race across the big screen has existed, fully formed, in his mind for almost 20 years. All the more remarkable ›

WARS



TAKING IT TO THE MAX

TOM HARDY GETS BEHIND THE WHEEL

Charlize Theron has said that there wasn't really a script for *Mad Max: Fury Road*, that it was all in George Miller's mind. How did that work?

He'd storyboarded the entire movie. I mean I've read comics, I like comic books. But I'd never seen a comic book like this, about 300 pages long. Every single frame of the film. Every frame. He had this film edited in his head long before we met him. So he didn't have to download all of that information. There was a script. But it was wild, you know, because it changed every day.

How detailed was his vision for the film?

Every single car is a character to George. You know, every single wheel. Every single prop is a meaningful prop. There's nothing extraneous. If George could account for every grain of sand that flew through the window, he would have it do the same thing, the same way, again. He'd label that and bring it back. Because that was a very good piece of sand!

Since your Max doesn't rely heavily on dialogue, how did you develop his body language?

I always wanted to play him as a slightly old man in a cardigan that's just had enough really. And he wants to go home and sit down with his dog and watch the telly. But he hasn't got a home, and he hasn't got a telly and he doesn't have a dog. There's nothing but silence, pain, and destruction. So he hasn't spoken for a long time. It's almost like this is Wile E Coyote [laughs].

Joseph McCabe

for the fact he never planned to make a sequel to the original Ozploitation classic.

"I never intended to make any more *Mad Max* movies after the first one, so by the end of the third one I really thought I'd never do another," Miller remembers. "And then one day I was walking across an intersection and as I got halfway across an idea flashed in my mind, but by the time I got to the other side of the road I'd put it aside again. And then two or three years later I was on a long haul flight and unbidden the movie played out in my head. The basis of that story – a chase across the wasteland into which Max is reluctantly caught up – was played out at that point."

ART ATTACK

With the engine of the story in place, Miller enlisted *2000 AD* comic artist Brendan McCarthy to help him construct *Fury Road*'s chassis. Together the pair storyboarded almost every shot in the film – a process spurred by Miller's decision to emphasise visuals over dialogue.

"We decided to plot out the story by building pictures with storyboards," Miller explains. "We brought in Mark Sexton and Peter Pound, two other artists, and we laid out the film on panels around the room, all drawn, many of which came to life on film directly off those drawings. We ended up having about 3,500 panels in a room around us where each moment played out with the visuals having primacy rather than the words. I always remember Hitchcock saying, 'I want to make films where they don't have to read the subtitles in Japan.' And that was one of the things that guided this. Plus the fact I really, really am into action and chase films!"

With the storyboards complete, Mel Gibson on board and funding in place the film almost went in front of cameras in 2003, only for the shoot to fall apart after the collapse of the Australian dollar in the wake of 9/11 and the Iraq War. Filming was set to resume again with new leading man Tom Hardy in 2011, only for Mother Nature to turn against them. "When we were about to go in 2011 we had over 150 vehicles built, roads built in the centre of Australia, all of our stunts rehearsed, cast in place, everything ready and then the rains came and what was meant to be flat desert roads became a grasslands of shrubs and flowers. The salt lakes where we wanted to shoot had pelicans and frogs in them. That was hardly *Mad Max*!"

"When we were about to go in 2011 we had over 150 vehicles built and roads built in the centre of Australia"

Given the film's seemingly cursed journey back to the big screen, no one would begrudge Miller throwing in the towel, but even through the making of other films *Fury Road* was never far from his thoughts. "Somehow it was a film that would never go away," Miller says. "I've made two *Happy Feet*s since the last *Mad Max*, written several other screenplays, but in the room where I work, which we call the *Mad Max* room, all those 3,500 drawings stayed up on the walls. So even if I was working on something else the film was always there, in plain sight."

THE HARDY BOY

By all rights finding someone to replace Mel Gibson as the leather-clad road warrior should have been a Sisyphean task equal to getting the film made, but Miller knew Tom Hardy was the man for the job the moment the Bane-to-be walked into the casting room in 2009. "He was the only guy who evoked that same animal magnetism that I first saw in Mel," Miller asserts. "He's made the role his own. He can't help but do that because he's a very distinct personality. They're both very masculine men and what makes them charismatic is you have a sense of their vulnerabilities and the conflicts inside them, so even when they're still you feel an intense life."

The Max of *Fury Road* still bears the scars of the first three films (no-one's saying "reboot" here) but Miller's taken the opportunity to get to know him better. "Max is still that figure out of most folklore and mythology – the lone wanderer. Whether it's the Ronin Samurai in Japan or the classic American gunslinger, he is that character again. In this film we get a little more inside his head."

The first film's Toecutter, Hugh Keays-Byrne, plays the Big Bad once again in *Fury Road* – here the Immortan Joe. It's his hunt for The Five Wives (including Rosie Huntington-Whiteley and Zoë Kravitz) after they're abducted by Charlize Theron's Furiosa and Nicholas Hoult's Nux that ignites the film's breathless chase across the post-apocalyptic wasteland. "This time Hugh's a tyrannical warlord who sits on top of a dominant hierarchy that rules the wasteland, so he's a gang leader who's become much more powerful. But he's not the Toecutter, he's got his own mythology now. He's the Immortan Joe – he's almost implying that he's immortal.

"Furiosa's one of the Immortan Joe's boss drivers," Miller continues. "She drives a great war rig and she's basically one of his Imperators, his elite drivers. So she's like a road warrior in her own right, but in the service of Immortan Joe until she goes on the run. Then, in the vortex of events, Max and Furiosa get thrown together." ↬

The annual outback road trip was not going well.

Director George Miller with new Max Tom Hardy.

The heavy metal festival always attracted some strange types.

Looks a lovely place to pull up and stop for lunch.

NO ARM DONE

CHARLIZE THERON TAKES ON THE ROAD WARRIOR

How did the physicality of the performance – the hair, the arm – benefit you as an actor?

It's really so helpful. It's always a great starting point when you walk into material where you don't necessarily have that right off the bat, because you can kind of start from the outside, and then realise how that influences the inside.

Because of the prosthetic arm, were you only acting with one hand at a time?

There were moments where I would sneak my real hand out and use that, and George [Miller] would be like, "You can't do that..." I think the hardest time was when I didn't have the arm with the fight scene. It's hard to get yourself off the ground sometimes when you're in the throes of a big fight scene, the adrenaline's pumping and you're just trying to be an animal surviving.

Did you get sick when you were shooting in Namibia?

Yeah, there were some severe injuries and illnesses going round, and dehydration was a big one – I think I lost two days on dehydration. It was physically a very tough movie. We all got real injuries and stuff.

You have a reputation for being fearless...

I don't think of myself as fearless. I'm a pussy! If anything, I try my best to be open-minded. But there's part of me now that's very much an adult. Now I think [before doing stunts]. I could tell some crazy Australian guy would think I was a baby – I don't care!

Matt Maytum

NEW TRICKS

Filming for *Fury Road* would finally begin on the red sands of Namibia in 2012 and just as the real world has changed in the 30 years since *Thunderdome*, *Mad Max*'s apocalyptic wasteland has changed with it. "I believe we've had the opportunity to expand the world and make it much more vivid, so this world is not a repeat of what was there 30 years ago," Miller says. "Most of all the technology has changed. We're now in a digital world and that makes a huge difference in shooting action because you can put relatively cheap cameras anywhere and if they get wrecked you can go to the airport and buy another."

Miller made use of new CGI technologies available to him too – erasing safety gear so the cast could film their own stunts, removing tyre tracks from previous takes to maintain the landscape's pristine appearance and keeping the sky consistent.

"From the get go it's one long chase so it's probably got more action than a lot of CGI blockbusters because we don't stop very often for talking," Miller says. "In another way it's much more grounded and elemental, so I would say it's closer to an epic Western on wheels than it is to a space opera, or a superhero story. It would share with them that kinetic energy and immersion, but it's different to any of them because it feels more earthy and real."

Miller considered resurrecting *Fury Road* as a 3D animated movie or a videogame after the first failed filming attempt, which is why he jumped at the chance to tell the backstories of several key characters in comic book form. "The film is on the run and to be able to fill out that background was a very enticing opportunity. One of them is about Nicholas Hoult's character Nux – when and how he came to be a war boy in the wasteland. You could never stop to tell that story in the movie."

"Tom Hardy was the only guy who evoked that same animal magnetism that I first saw in Mel"

The comics will follow in the months following *Fury Road*'s release, but the good news for anyone anticipating another 30-year wait for *Mad Max 5* is that two sequel scripts are already written. "Well, with the delays and getting into all of the backstories Nick Lathouris [co-writer] and I have written two other scripts with Mad Max and Furiosa," Miller reveals. "We have them virtually ready to go, so if *Fury Road* does well enough and we can bring the band back together in terms of crew we'll do those movies." SFX

Mad Max: Fury Road is released on 15 May.

SURFING THE ZEITGEIST

MAD MAX-INSPIRED COMIC *FREAKWAVE* IS A PATH TO *FURY ROAD* FOR BRENDAN MCCARTHY

Set in a flooded, future Earth, *Freakwave* was inspired by Brendan McCarthy's youthful love of *Mad Max 2*. Co-written by Peter Milligan, it was serialised in *Strange Days*, their 1983 Eclipse Comics anthology with the late Brett Ewins. Three decades later, it has led to the artist being hired to not only create visuals for *Fury Road* but to also collaborate on the script with George Miller.

"*Mad Max 2* blew the younger me away to a degree that I haven't experienced in a movie before or since," says McCarthy. "*Freakwave* was an attempt to capture that visceral excitement on paper. At the time, no one had ever done a decent surfing strip, and mixing that up with the post-apocalyptic *Mad Max* world was a lot of fun. Eventually, *Freakwave* evolved into a very psychedelic fusion of *Road Warrior* and *Alice In Wonderland*."

Describing his work with the Australian as "a great learning experience", McCarthy's expanded role on the film evolved naturally. "Initially, George asked me to do storyboards and come up with new and original design concepts, as I had a style and design take on the *Mad Max* universe that excited him. But he also liked my story ideas and then asked me to co-write the film with him."

Claiming that they "hammered out the story like two furious fighters in the Thunderdome," McCarthy believes that *Fury Road* will also stand the test of time. "I love the actual look of the movie, the tribal design, the cinematography and, of course, the manic vehicular vandalism and 'the delight in destruction' as one critic famously noted of *Road Warrior*," he says. "Hopefully, the insane new characters we've invented will be lovingly welcomed by Toecutter, Humungus, Wez and Master Blaster into the *Mad Max* Hall of Crazed Lunatics!" **Stephen Jewell**

Biggest expense after the apocalypse? Sun lotion.

Just an old man in a cardigan.

BROUGHT TO COOK

THE SFX WRITER INTERVIEW

Jim Butcher

Ahoy! The creator of *The Dresden Files* on drawing inspiration from naval fiction

WORDS BY JONATHAN WRIGHT ● PORTRAIT BY KAREN HACKER

When Jim Butcher crosses the Atlantic this spring to attend Eastercon as a guest of honour, it will be his first visit to the UK. While Butcher says he's not a great traveller, he's clearly looking forward to visiting the country "where all my favourite fantasy worlds came from".

We can but hope the Park Inn Hotel, Heathrow, venue for Dysprosium 2015, doesn't come as too much of a disappointment to a man steeped in Rudyard Kipling, CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien. "I'm in awe of what the huge fantasy authors of the UK have done," Butcher says. "I took their stuff, and the stuff that I loved as a kid, and I've tried to take those same elements and add my own insanity to them."

It's insanity that's connected with audiences around the world, principally via *Storm Front* (2000) and its sequels in *The Dresden Files* sequence, urban fantasies starring PI wizard Harry Dresden, who tackles paranormal crimes in Chicago. The books have sold in their millions, somewhat to the bemusement of their creator.

"It's weird being famous cos it just sort of happened and I wasn't planning on it," he says. "I just wanted to write books to provide for my family and make a living at a job where I didn't have to wear a tie. And when the books actually took off and I started getting attention, it was very strange. I'm not quite sure how to deal with that because I'm really not a terribly interesting person but people seem to think I am at conventions."

His answer has been to create "Famous Author Guy". It's this character who appears on stage at conventions and chats amiably down a phone line from Butcher's home in Independence, Missouri. In his day-to-day life, things are a little different. Butcher is an introvert whose dog, a little white Bichon Frisé who's convinced he's a "fearsome warrior", is "much more of a people person" than its owner.

"I'm the guy who can't quite get his cheque book balanced, ever, who cooks completely with the microwave," he says. "I hardly use my stove at all because, when I use the stove, bad things happen. I'm a horrible cook, I can burn soup, it's amazing."

"I just wanted to make a living at a job where I didn't have to wear a tie"

BIODATA

- **OCCUPATION:** Novelist
- **BORN:** 1971
- **FROM:** Missouri, USA
- **GREATEST HITS:** Not only have *The Dresden Files* been bestsellers, but the books spawned a short-lived TV series.
- **RANDOM FACT:** Butcher is a huge Terry Pratchett fan since reading 1994 *Discworld* novel *Soul Music*: "The concept of Death as the major defender of humanity was a concept I just loved."

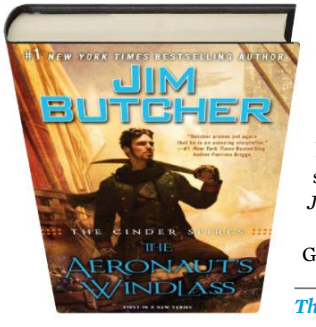
Which might in part explain why Harry Dresden is so popular with fans, because Harry isn't a conventional hero. Like his creator, Harry is more than a little geeky. "He's a computer nerd except he works with magic instead of computers," says Butcher. "And he gets to be the hero that many people would like to be, and that, god, I hope nobody ever has to be. But at the same time, he's kind of the Charlie Brown of urban fantasy because he can't get a break."

That said, while Butcher is clearly grateful to his most successful creation, he acknowledges there are difficulties with keeping such a long-running series – 15 novels and counting including *The Skin Game*, recently published in paperback – fresh. Readers, he points out, "hang out with Harry Dresden for an afternoon or a couple of days". In contrast, says Butcher, "When you're writing [the books] you have to hang out with Harry Dresden every day, and I get sick of that guy."

Time for a break, and Butcher's next book, *The Aeronaut's Windlass*, due this autumn, will be the first in a new steampunk sequence, *The Cinder Spires*. Its genesis says much about Butcher's pragmatic attitude towards his craft. "I started writing several different novels, and sharing them with beta-readers and seeing which one I got the strongest response on," he says. Because he likes to end chapters with cliffhangers, Butcher says he thinks of those who read for him as residing in a "Beta Asylum" because they have to wait so long to find out what happens next. "They do complain about this a lot and I know I'm doing my job well when I get lots of complaints."

For a sequence where much of the action is set aboard airships, Butcher has taken inspiration from naval fiction written by the likes of CS Forester (the *Hornblower* books) and Patrick O'Brian (*Master And Commander*). When *SFX* jokes about his appropriating British cultural heroes and archetypes, Butcher counters that American culture is all about appropriation. "For me, when I see something that is worthy and neat in a story, it's like, 'That's what I want, something awesome,'" he says, "and there is an undue amount of awesome in the figure of Hornblower."

But in the end, Butcher suggests, it won't be down to his ability to twist the tropes of naval fiction if the books are a success, it will be because the books will feature talking cats. He's resigned to this. "They're sort of like a little fuzzy Mafia," he explains. "'I notice your warehouse is rodent free, perhaps you would like it to continue to be rodent free and perhaps there will be cream waiting for us every Thursday at 5pm?'"



As to what steampunks might make of the books, Butcher is a little nervous. "I'm actually intimidated by the prospect of meeting steampunk fans because I don't know if I'm sufficiently read in steampunk to hold a worthy conversation with them," he says. "The steampunkiest thing I've read that I can think of is *John Carter Of Mars*."

So long as he remembers to call on Famous Author Guy, we're sure it'll all work out fine. SFX

The Aeronaut's Windlass is published in September.

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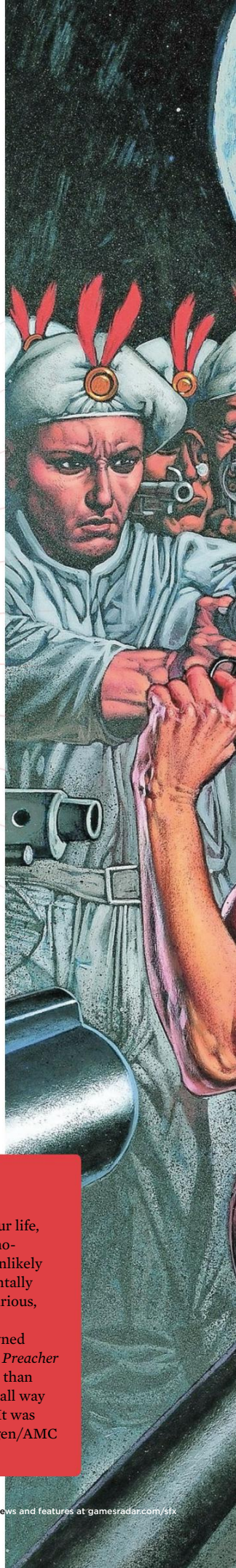
20/20

THE GREATEST COMICS OF SFX'S FIRST 20 YEARS

In the first of our celebratory 20/20 features looking back at two decades of *SFX*, Matt Bielby runs down the unmissable comic books of the period

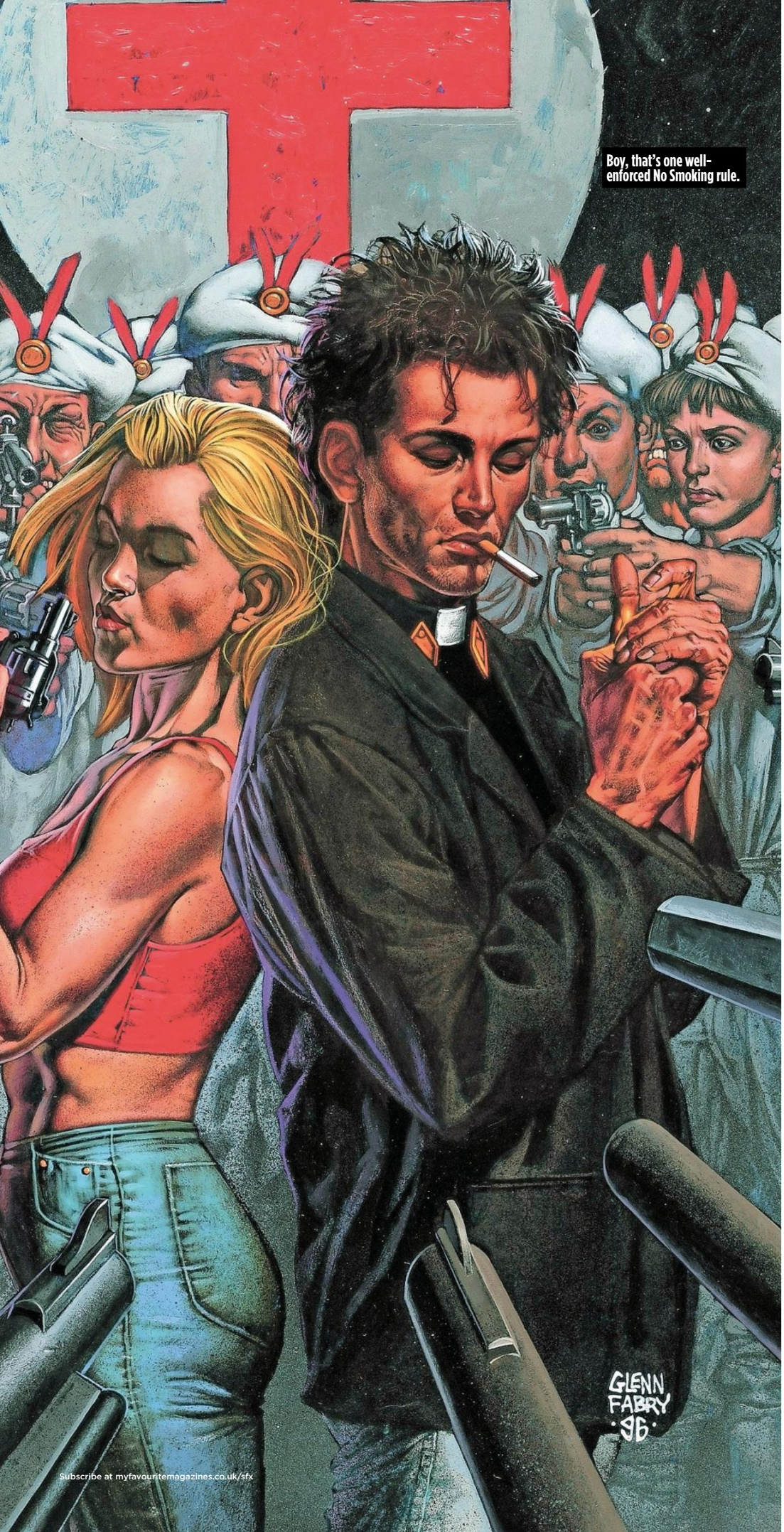
#sfx20



A LOT'S HAPPENED IN THE WORLD of comics during *SFX*'s run: the rise, semi-collapse, then rise again of Image Comics; the arrival of further new publishers and universes, from Valiant to CrossGen; and endless character makeovers, retcons and universe reboots. We saw huge sales collapses for mainstream superhero comics even as, concurrently, the movies spinning out of them stampeded the box office. And then there was the ever-more-pervasive influence of Japanese manga, and the unstoppable rise of individual hits like *The Walking Dead*, often driven by the arrival of established film and television writers in the medium. A heady time, then, but what stands out? What comic books have really innovated and propelled the industry forward? And what should you look to pick up in graphic novel form? Let's see, shall we...?

PREACHER

Running for the first five years of our life, Garth Ennis's *Preacher* – a Tarantino-esque road trip undertaken by an unlikely Texas churchman after he's accidentally gifted with divine power – was hilarious, shocking, and flirted with bad taste gleefully. Your standard creator-owned book these days, you might say, but *Preacher* showed more ambition and control than its many imitators, helped in no small way by artist Steve Dillon's quietly sensational storytelling. It was always an HBO show on paper – and, finally, a Seth Rogen/AMC series seems imminent.



Y: THE LAST MAN

Y: The Last Man made its mark by eschewing the in-your-face approach of most adult-orientated science fiction comics, instead telling a quieter story of the end of the world, one where something (a plague, perhaps?) has killed off everyone with a Y chromosome, leaving only women – and a lone male survivor, the frustrating Yorick Brown. Created by writer Brian K Vaughan and a female artist, the quietly potent Pia Guerra, it built a compelling, credible picture of how an all-female society might struggle into a working model of sorts – and what happened next.

FABLES

The idea of fairytale characters being forced to live in the real world isn't unique – American TV has dished up both *Grimm* and *Once Upon A Time* since – but this long-running Vertigo series by writer Bill Willingham and assorted artists (notably Mark Buckingham) is the best realised of them all. The Big Bad Wolf, Snow White, Cinderella and more have been forced out of their European fable homelands by "the Adversary" (eventually revealed to be Pinocchio creator Geppetto) and are now hiding out on New York's Upper West Side.

LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

Initially this was just a "Justice League of Victorian England" – creator Alan Moore grabbing fantastical period literary characters (notably Captain Nemo, Mr Hyde and the Invisible Man) and throwing them together in a dark, witty stew that referenced both the original works and all the familiar tropes of superhero teams. The first two stories – which pitted our heroes against Fu Manchu and the Martian invasion from *The War Of The Worlds* – are the most conventional, and remain many people's favourites; all, though, are dense with background detail. ➔

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ALL-STAR SUPERMAN

Making Batman seem cool is one thing; doing the same with Superman – the first proper superhero, with his Dudley Do-Right personality and inventive but easily mocked supporting cast – is something else. But from 2005-2008, writer Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely did just that, revelling in all that can be considered naive and silly about the Man of Steel. In a near-perfect series of done-in-one, not-in-continuity tales, they didn't make Clark Kent fresh again so much as reminded us why he'd been the most compelling superhero all along.

THE AUTHORITY

These days, teams like the Avengers and JLA clash at the box office almost as often as they do on the spinner racks, but it wasn't always like this – and much of what's exciting about current superhero stories, on paper and on screen, can be placed firmly at the door of *The Authority* – Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch's in-your-face reinvention of the form that added wide-screen Michael Bay action, a willingness to acknowledge the consequences of actions, and vip, vigour and vim in helpings not seen since Jack Kirby.

THE ULTIMATES

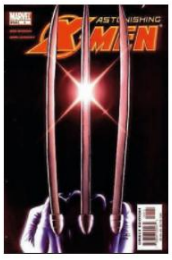
This alternate version of *The Avengers* was the highlight of Marvel's ultimately failed "Ultimate" universe – basically, the same stories told again, but with a sleek modern hipness – and the current Marvel movie universe owes almost as much to *The Ultimates* as it does the works of Stan and Jack, from the Samuel L Jackson-model Nick Fury to Hawkeye's wisecrack-free scowling. Hot on the heels of the astounding Authority, and by two of its creators, this was clever, big budget superhero storytelling firing on every cylinder.

RUNAWAYS

The big comics have a problem: their core characters are all at least 50 years old. So how can you make the medium appealing to a new generation? Well, perhaps with comics like *Runaways* – new school-age heroes existing in the Marvel Universe. This tale of *Buffy*-esque Californian teens attempting to make up for the evil done by their parents, a gang of supervillains called the Pride, stuttered sales-wise, but the critical acclaim was loud – for fans of youth teams from Teen Titans to Young Avengers, this was a key book.

ASTONISHING X-MEN

THE JOSS WHEDON RUN



In terms of ambition, wit, confidence and emotional thump-to-the-heart, *Astonishing X-Men* proved to be serial adventure storytelling at its absolute pinnacle, ramping up the thrills and mystery with every instalment. With writer Joss Whedon it's not just the big action moments that matter, but the masterful feats of misdirection too, while the dialogue is to-die-for. Oh, and he totally gets that the X-Men is the story of a dysfunctional, put-upon family too – one where everyone counts, and gets their moment to shine.

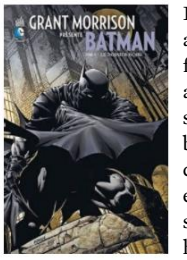
FANTASTIC FOUR

THE JONATHAN HICKMAN RUN

There's an argument that says the *Fantastic Four* is the most important comic of them all, but in recent years (and certainly during *SFX*'s lifetime) it's always existed in the shadows of the *X-Men*, *Avengers*, *Spider-Man* et al. That changed, however, with a smart, lengthy run that finished in 2012. It was by writer Jonathan Hickman (plus artists like Steve Epting), and it saw the Human Torch dead (although he was later resurrected), the costumes gone monochrome, and Reed and Sue's brainy kids, Franklin and Valeria, stepping into the limelight.

BATMAN

THE GRANT MORRISON RUN



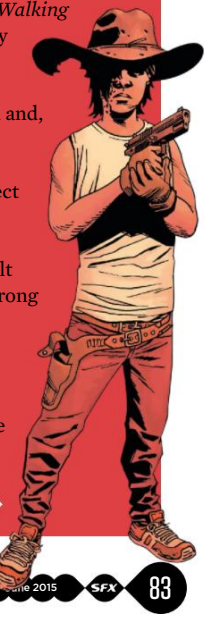
Intense, strangely jerky and not always easy to follow this may be, but it's also the most vital and surprising Batman has been in decades, the coolest storyline for the eternally coolest superhero. Morrison handles mainstream superhero books with the same confidence and ambition he does his more personal work – indeed, at times the added constrictions seem to benefit him – and his Batman run is full of great moments, unexpected references to near-forgotten adventures from Bruce Wayne's past, balancing every baffling moment with genuine thrills.

SAGA

Following *Y: The Last Man*, Brian K Vaughan dropped out of comics for a bit, then made a spectacular return with *Saga*, one of the most compelling space operas of recent years, a fairytale-esque epic of spaceships, alien worlds, gender politics and high adventure. We follow a mismatched, mixed-species couple on the run with their baby daughter while, behind them, an intergalactic war between magical and scientific factions rages. For some, *Saga* has become this generation's *Star Wars* – and with the added benefit of robot-on-robot sex scenes too.

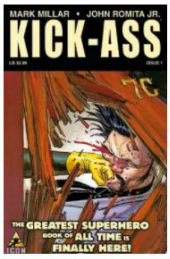
THE WALKING DEAD

In this world of box set TV show bingeing, an extended indie project like *The Walking Dead* – by writer Robert Kirkman and, largely, artist Charlie Adlard – makes perfect sense. A black-and-white zombie story, you'd have expected it to be a modest cult hit, no more, but its mix of strong characterisation, genuinely surprising storytelling and horror violence has not only spawned a hit TV show, but saw the landmark 100th issue shift over 380,000 copies, making it the biggest-selling comic book of recent years.



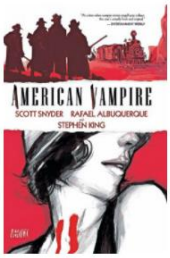
Kick-Ass – or is that ass-kicked?

KICK-ASS



Mark Millar's incredible run as a movie ideas machine is quite unprecedented in modern comics, and the project that kicked down the wall for him – doubtless screaming some obscenity while breaking its ankle as it did so – was *Kick-Ass*, a "What if superheroes were real?" story that eclipses all similar efforts through wit, sharp twists, ultra-violence, and a commitment to the idea that nobody in this universe has superpowers. While relentlessly potty-mouthed and morally dubious, it's also undeniably charming – not to mention cinematic as hell.

AMERICAN VAMPIRE



This ongoing creator-owned Vertigo series from DC superstar Scott Snyder also contained – in its early issues – the first comic scripting from a certain Stephen King. It started with a bang, then, and has continued at similar pace, Snyder turning out to be exactly the superstar everyone had expected him to be. It tells of a new American mutation of the vampire species – extended of fang, laughing at sunlight, and feared as much by worried Euro-vamps as by their human victims – as it colonises the 20th century.

PLANETARY

Spring 1999 saw two Warren Ellis series appear through Wildstorm: the bombastic *The Authority* and *Planetary*, a quieter tale of troubled "superhero archaeologists" poking around in the corners of a wider comic book universe and uncovering its mysteries and dirty secrets. Our heroic trio are field agents for the mysterious Planetary organisation, and encounter thinly disguised versions of Tarzan and Superman, Godzilla and Thor, eventually coming into conflict with a rival group looking to use the strange phenomena they uncover for evil ends.

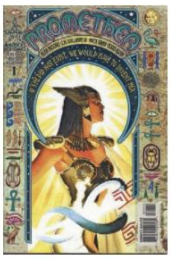
BONE

There was once a rich "funny animal" strain to American comics – think Carl Barks and Scrooge McDuck – and Jeff Smith's black-and-white, independently published *Bone*, which ran for 55 sporadic issues until 2004, was a rare and welcome modern variation on the theme. Inspired by Barks and Walt Kelly's Pogo, it played like a gag-heavy *Lord Of The Rings*, with three blob-like creatures at its core. Since collected into one massive, 1,300-page volume of sweeping fantasy and light-hearted comedy, *Bone* makes for a refreshing respite from angst-filled superheroes.

JIMMY CORRIGAN, THE SMARTEST KID ON EARTH

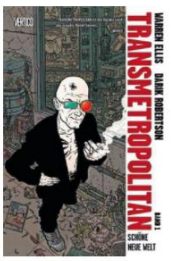
Can comics be art? Look at most of them and you'd have to say no – or, at least, not at any level of ambition above your typical smartly crafted James Cameron movie. But then along comes something like Chris Ware's semi-autobiographical, often text-free, and always flashback and parallel-storyline heavy Jimmy Corrigan, telling what appear to be the fantasies of a sad, lonely middle-aged man alongside the 1893 World's Fair adventures of his grandfather as a little boy. Swamped with awards, it rewards repeated readings like few other comics.

PROMETHEA

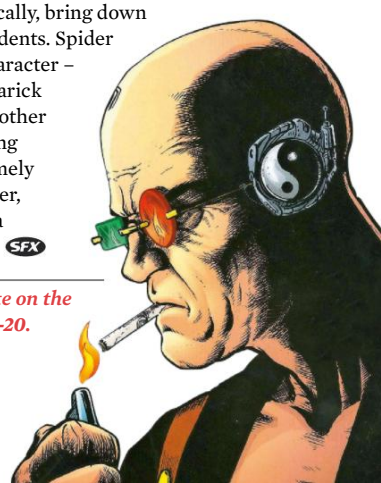


Alan Moore's *America's Best Comics* – a half-dozen somewhat interlocking monthly comic books, all written by Moore – was some feat of creation and endurance, but it was a while before it became clear that *Promethea* was the most ambitious and personal of them all. Beginning with a young girl gaining the powers of a magical Wonder Woman-like figure, and ending with joyful Apocalypse, it was visually ambitious, highly experimental, and increasingly rammed with lectures on feminism, the occult and the tarot that delighted and infuriated comic book audiences in equal measure.

TRANSMETROPOLITAN



There have been remarkably few true cyberpunk comics, but *Transmetropolitan* is one: the tale of a rogue, flawed Hunter S Thompson-esque gonzo journalist in a dystopian future, and his violent, self-destructive attempts to break people out of their ruts and, specifically, bring down two corrupt American presidents. Spider Jerusalem is a polarising character – creators Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson would have it no other way – and his rambling, biting adventures can seem tiresomely childish at times. Put together, though, these 60 issues are a remarkably sustained satire. SFX



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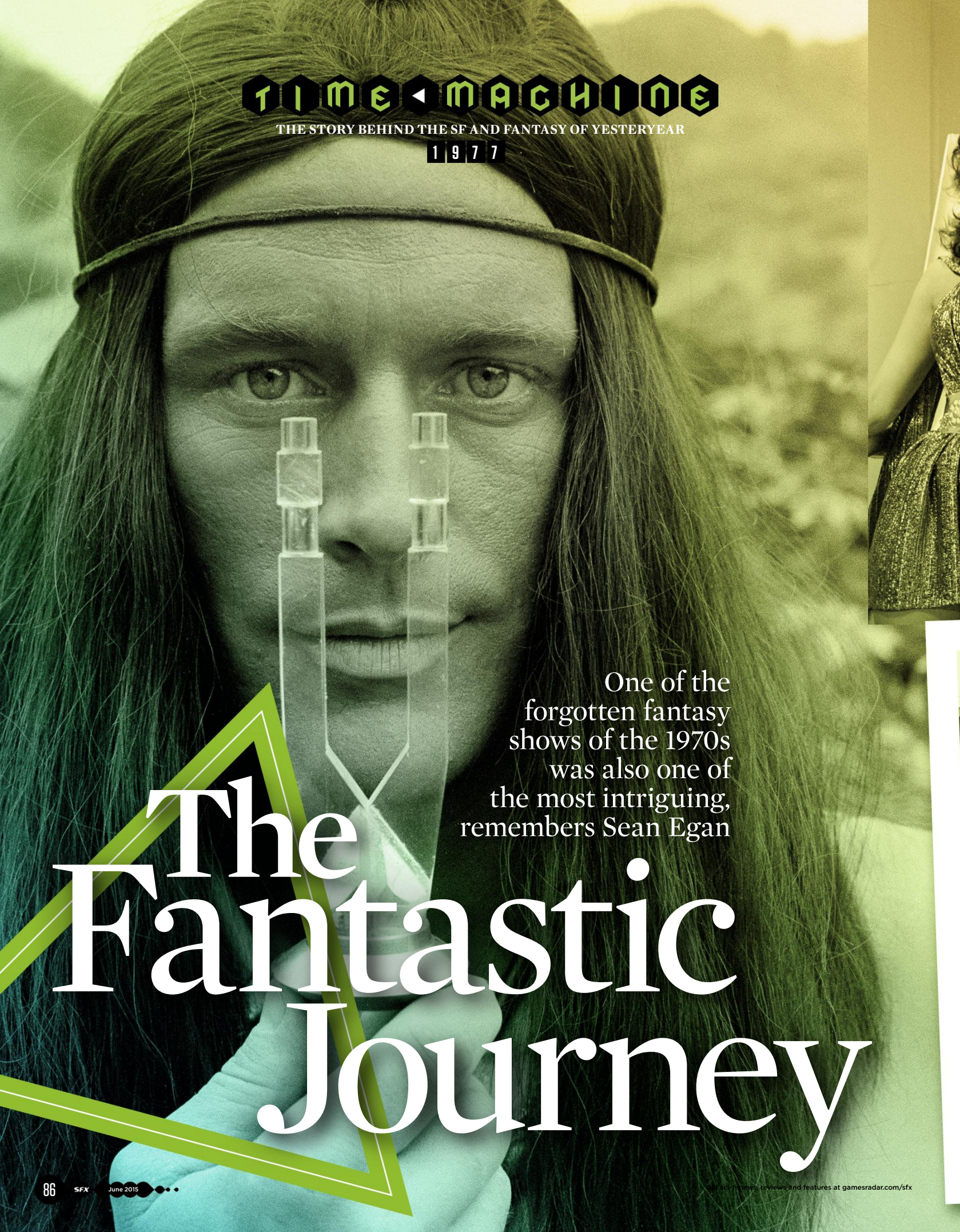

TIME MACHINE

THE STORY BEHIND THE SF AND FANTASY OF YESTERYEAR

1977

One of the forgotten fantasy shows of the 1970s was also one of the most intriguing, remembers Sean Egan

The Fantastic Journey

Flick the switch! Dodgy experiments in "A Dream Of Conquest".

Liana was played by Katie Saylor – before her mysterious disappearance.

THE FATE OF *THE*

Fantastic Journey reflected its own premise, ironically. An intriguing TV drama about a group of travellers who disappeared into a mysterious vortex, it fleetingly entertained '70s audiences before vanishing as surely as had its protagonists, slipping from the public consciousness after its brief run and remaining unissued on video or DVD.

The Fantastic Journey was created for NBC by Bruce Lansbury, a writer and producer who had previously devised *The Barbary Coast* and *The Magician*. Its jumping-off point was the Bermuda Triangle, interest in which was then at a peak. The show's two-part pilot – first aired on 3 and 10 February 1977 – depicted a pleasure boat sailing into a green mist in that area of ocean notable for swallowing ships and planes. The party aboard are shipwrecked in an uncharted and bizarre land where they repeatedly find themselves stepping – with a blue flash – through invisible portals that take them into wildly contrasting worlds. Or as one of them, Professor Paul Jordan, observed, "We're in some kind of time-lock. A space-time continuum: past, present and future exist together, each on its own terms."

Explains Ike Eisenmann, who played Jordan's 13-year-old son Scotty, "The nature of the arc of the series was that they were wanting to find this mythic place within the story called Evoland where we can go back to where we first came from."

The stranded party hook up with one of the many other people also trapped on the island. Varian (Jared Martin) is a twinkle-eyed, preternaturally calm musician-healer from 2230. He wields a gizmo that can heal people, but which – like Thor's hammer – only responds to his touch.

The pilot juxtaposed a futuristic-looking dystopia called Atlantium run by a grotesque brain in a jar with the escapades of a group of Elizabethan privateers led by the brooding Sir James Camden (a young Ian McShane). Sir James is anxious for news of the Armada threatening England and mistakes Fred Walters – a black medical school graduate played by Carl Franklin – for Jordan's slave.

Despite displaying such cleverness, the historical content was immediately abandoned due to advance feedback. Recalls Eisenmann, "Originally, the idea was to make it more of a fantasy which could go at any time in history, backwards or forwards. The skew as far as the screenings were concerned found that people were more interested in the science fiction aspect of the show than they were the historical possibilities. The futuristic parts that were incorporated into the pilot were brought into play after we shot the pilot itself. They restructured it and re-cut those things into it."

The producers also ruthlessly axed three of the original six characters who hadn't rated well on the screenings, one of whom was no less than Scotty's dad. "It was shocking to see that they had taken the father out of the story ↪

GETTY (3)

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and left his son abandoned," Eisenmann tells *SFX*. "They really barely dealt with it in terms of Scotty's character."

Ex-*Star Trek* writer DC Fontana was brought in at this point to help guide the travellers' search for Evoland. She reveals, "I once asked Bruce Lansbury, 'Where did that come from?' He said, 'Spell the first four letters backwards.' I said, 'Oh, that's what we're looking for, is it?'"

CHANGING THINGS ROUND

Losing half the cast was unfortunate and the jettisoning of the island's historical element rather a shame. However, the *Fantastic Journey* recalibrated by Fontana and her fellow story editor Calvin Clements Jr had its own qualities. Interesting new characters were introduced: Liana (Katie Saylor) was a half-alien, half-Atlantium telepath with a sentient cat; Roddy McDowall played morally ambiguous 1960s scientist Dr Jonathan Willoway. Moreover, the producers decided to optimise the potential of each character by giving each of them a showcase episode.

A modern mind, used to more edgy, knowing televisual fare, might ask questions like why the time zones stayed separate instead of fertilising each other's cultures – yet, contrarily, all spoke English – and would notice the formulaic nature of most of the episodes, which revolved around the group stumbling upon and then overthrowing tyranny. However, for a child of the era, it was delightful stuff. The fantastical elements of the show were captivating by default: the miniskirted, knee-booted Saylor provided a crush figure, Eisenmann a character for youngsters to relate to and McDowall a comfortably familiar voice from the *Planet Of The Apes* TV series that had not long left the screens. Moreover, the element of family created by the disparate but united team of travellers made for a cosy ambience.

Eisenmann's showcase was "Children Of The Gods", which saw his character having to rescue his companions from a society of malevolent children. Eisenmann found the off-camera goings-on not too dissimilar to the episode's confrontational story: "It was awkward to have a group of younger performers around because jealousy can run amok off-camera. Myself being the star of the show, I felt kind of apart from everyone else, then had to step on camera and work intimately with them."

Willoway's episode was "Funhouse", wherein an evil wizard with designs on the scientist's soul ensnared the travellers in what looked like an abandoned contemporary travelling carnival. For Eisenmann, the episode stands out "because it was the most dynamic, it was the most intense, there were really interesting things going on in it ... It reminded me more of *Twilight Zones* than *Star Trek*." Indeed so intense was its house-of-horrors element that the BBC, who aired the series in the UK, declined to broadcast it.

Although Fontana helped rework the already commissioned scripts to conform to the new direction, the only episode bearing her formal writing credit is "Turnabout", which showed a society where women – led by a character played by Joan Collins – turned on men and then transpired to be as bad as their former oppressors. "Women were starting to be more prominent, had gotten more rights, and I wanted to put that into this story," she says. "It's a story that has been done many times. I was hoping I could bring something to it." Eisenmann had a less complicated perspective: "Being my age at the time, it was not at all a problem for me to have so many beautiful women around!"

There would be one fewer beautiful woman around after episode eight, when Liana abruptly disappeared. "We lost Katie Saylor," recalls Fontana. "She told the producer, 'I have to get checked out at the hospital,' and to the best of my knowledge she never came back into showbusiness at all.

Dr Fred Walters actor Karl Franklin also went on to play a doctor in *ALF*!

Have Karen Somerville and Susan Howard caught sight of the grumpy TV bosses?

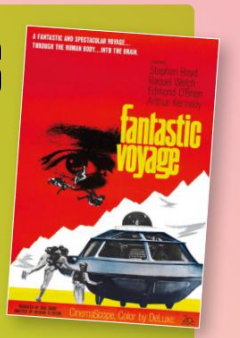
THE GO-TO SF KID

Ike Eisenmann long ago left acting behind for production and sound effects work, reverting to his legal name of Iake Eissinmann in the process.

In the '70s, however, he seemed to have a monopoly on child science fiction roles. His other SF credits include television show *The Winged Colt* and movies *Escape To/Return From Witch Mountain* and *Star Trek II*. "I loved science fiction," he says. "I found myself working a bit harder on my auditions for things like *Star Trek II*." He still gets people yelling "The bloody handprint!" in reference to the way his dying character Peter Preston messed up Kirk's shirt in *Wrath Of Khan*.

Lester Fletcher and Roddy McDowall in what might be the world's campest photograph.

WHERE'S RAQUEL?



As if it wasn't bad enough that their show got cancelled, Eisenmann and Fontana have had to endure confusion caused by its name. Eisenmann: "Whenever I would bring it up, they'd say, 'You mean when they shrunk that spaceship and shot it in the human body?'" People, of course, were thinking of the 1966 Raquel Welch cinema vehicle *Fantastic Voyage*, and for Eisenmann the confusion seemed pre-ordained: "The cast had more than one conversation about people we knew who were even at that time making the same mistake."

"SHE TOLD THE PRODUCER, 'I HAVE TO GO TO HOSPITAL,' AND THAT WAS THE LAST WE EVER SAW OF HER"

That was the last anybody ever saw of her. The last two shows without Katie, we had to explain her away." The rumours that have since swirled about the actress (including one that she is now deceased) are interesting in light of Eisenmann's recollections: "She seemed to be a bit of a troubled personality. She was new to the business. She stepped into the series with a little bit of a star attitude that none of the other cast members demonstrated in their work ethic." Of her disappearance, he says, "We never were completely sure whether she quit or the difficulties became too much for the producers and they let her go. It wasn't the greatest relationships among all of us with her."

DONE IN A RUSH

However, the cast had more severe problems to dwell on. The first was brief turnaround times. Recalls Eisenmann, "The show had been produced so butted up against its airdate. We were getting scripts just days before we were to shoot the next episode. We didn't have enough lead time to figure out where our characters were supposed to be."

Although the professionalism of the actors saw them do their best in less-than-ideal circumstances, they were helpless to influence another factor working to slowly undermine the programme's chances of survival. Says Eisenmann, "The third week of the show was pre-empted. I can't remember whether it was a sporting event or some sort of NBC special that was on, but we didn't go back on the air until the fourth week of the show. You end up losing the build of an audience when you do that. Then they shifted the schedule around, moved it from one night to another, because the ratings had dropped, initially because of the pre-empted episode, then they tried to move it around to help re-gather an audience.

"It did lay a bit of a heavy wet blanket over all of us. Roddy McDowall pointed out to me, given his own history in the industry, 'Ike, you're very young, if this doesn't go, you've got an entire career ahead of you.' That helped keep my enthusiasm in the game, but it seemed a little bit harder to pull out a performance if you don't have the hopeful enthusiasm that you would had the ratings been consistent."

Fontana recalls, "About the middle of the 10 episodes we were starting to hear, 'We might be in trouble.'" As ratings failed to improve, the swirling rumours of cancellation became reality. Remembers Eisenmann, "We only ended up shooting 10 episodes – it was slated for 13. We were pretty much expecting it. The whole cast and crew came together on the stage and the producers shared the news with us."

Both Eisenmann and Fontana were left with a sense of grievance. Says Fontana, "If we had been given a better timeslot, I think the show could have gone on and had several years." Eisenmann laments, "It ended up disappearing before we knew it. Within a matter of months, no one even remembered the show. They didn't even bother to re-run the episodes, and that's a real slap in the face."

This state of cultural invisibility finally came to an end in the early 1990s with the explosion of cable. "When the Sci-Fi Channel picked up the show and ran it like crazy, that was the beginning of its resurgence as a cult classic," Eisenmann tells *SFX*.

"Classic" may be pushing it somewhat, but *The Fantastic Journey*'s rescue from limbo is welcome for those who fondly remember it as providing the sort of imaginative entertainment rare on television prior to the point where *Star Wars* finally made SF mainstream. SFX

GETTY (4), KOBAL (1)

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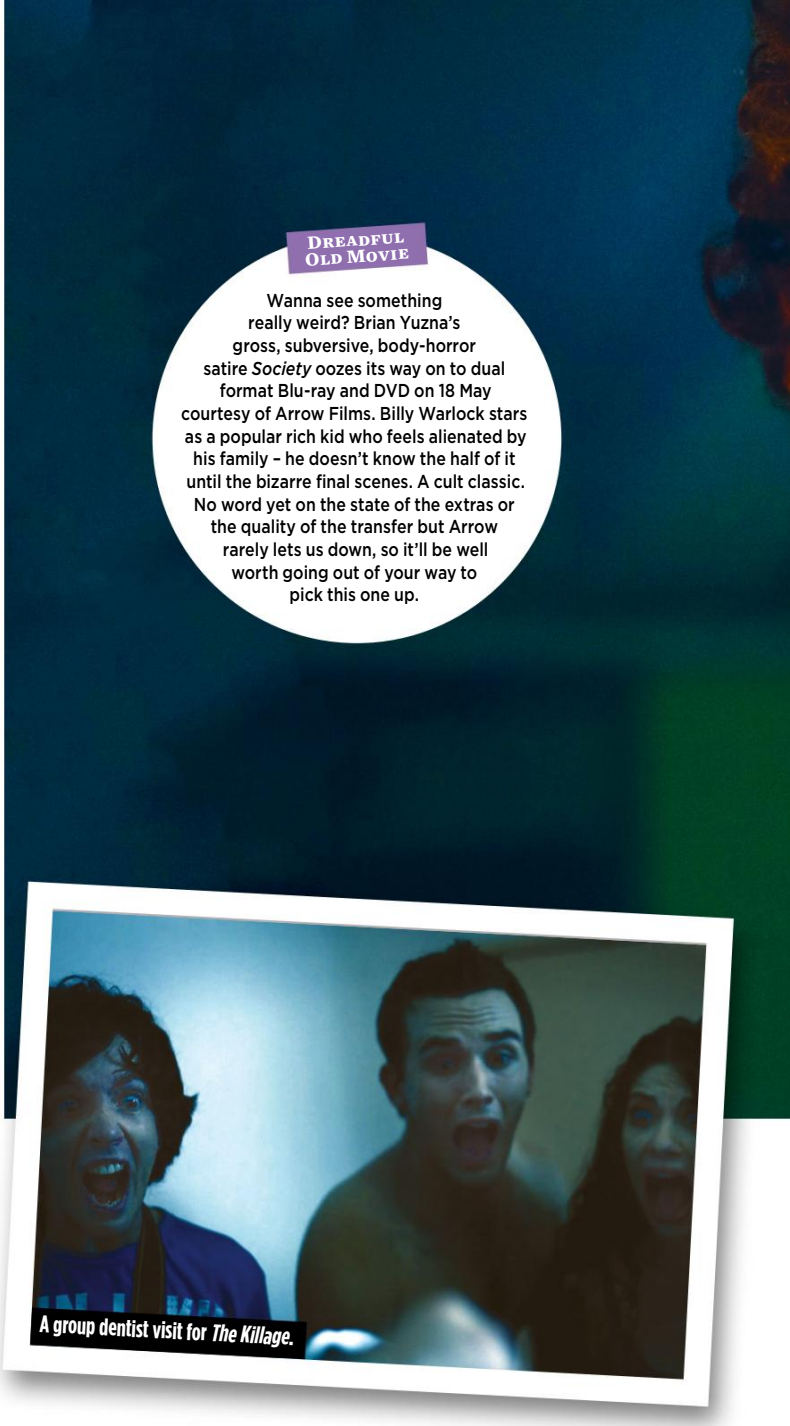
PENNY DREADFUL

What's happening in the world of horror movies this month...

It's judgement month. Not all hot and burny like in *T2*, but more a time when big budget remake-fever is going crazy, straight-to-DVD nonsense is getting silly and the BBFC has stumbled upon another film that it just can't classify. Plus: it's exams at Dreadful High. Don't have time to watch *Spring* and submit your critical analysis? See me after class!



DREADFUL OLD MOVIE

Wanna see something really weird? Brian Yuzna's gross, subversive, body-horror satire *Society* oozes its way on to dual format Blu-ray and DVD on 18 May courtesy of Arrow Films. Billy Warlock stars as a popular rich kid who feels alienated by his family – he doesn't know the half of it until the bizarre final scenes. A cult classic. No word yet on the state of the extras or the quality of the transfer but Arrow rarely lets us down, so it'll be well worth going out of your way to pick this one up.

A group dentist visit for *The Killage*.

THE BANNY GAME

"Terrorisation, mutilation, physical and sexual abuse [...] accompanied by constant strong verbal racist abuse..." The latest film banned by the BBFC sounds like a little bundle of joy, as a group of neo-Nazis invades the home of a Jewish family. *Hate Crime* is one of a handful of horror films in recent years to be refused classification – joining *Murder Set Pieces*, *Grotesque* and *The Bunny Game* on the shelf of shame. "I am honoured to know that my mind is officially too twisted for the UK," responded director James Cullen Bressack before adding: "As a critic and journalist, you should at least see the film you are criticising and do your research to learn that the filmmaker is Jewish. However I have to admit that I do appreciate the press." I haven't seen the film. I can't comment on quality (it *sounds* crap). But should it be banned? The BBFC isn't especially draconian these days; we're well past the era of "ban this sick filth". It doesn't claim to be an arbiter of taste, instead focusing on whether a film is likely to cause harm. Commendable, but isn't this out of date? Would anyone have even heard of *Hate Crime* without this banning? And given that it has been released in the US, is it really going to be that difficult to watch? If *Hate Crime* really is offensive and harmful nonsense, surely no publicity is good publicity. And if it's actually edgy, underground social commentary – let those who go in for portrayals of terrorisation, mutilation, physical and sexual abuse discover it for themselves.

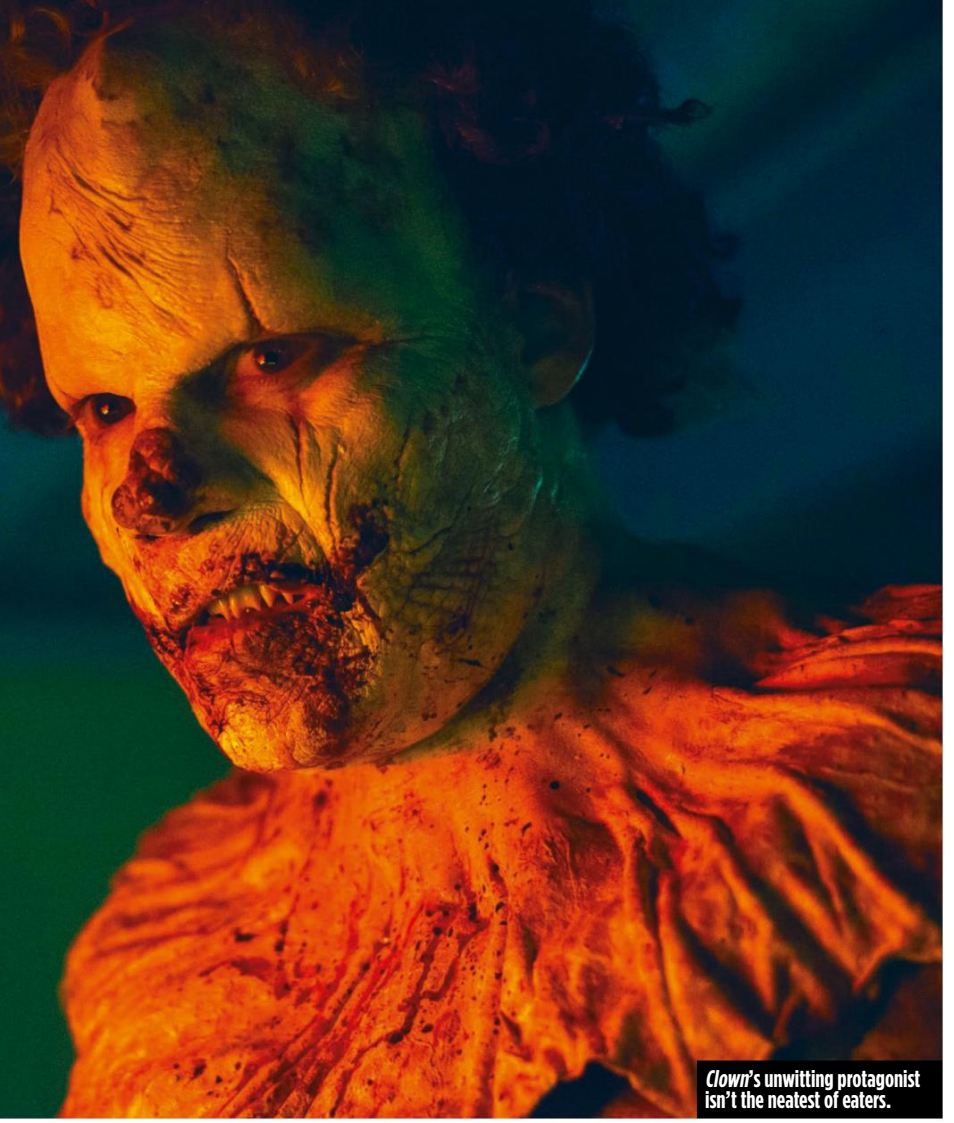
PENNY WISE

Of course, you never know when something that looks terrible will turn out to be a little gem. Straight-to-DVD horror *Clown* is as fun as a guy in massive trousers tipping over a bucket of confetti! (Okay, far more fun). Sweet father and Mr Tumble lookalike Kent can't find a clown for his kid's party, so he dresses in a scuzzy old costume he finds in a basement and does it himself. Only at the end he can't get the costume off. Or the wig. Or the nose. And it's starting to make him feel weird... Funny, a little bit sad, with a great supporting role for Peter Stormare as a crazy old guy who wants to behead Kent, this is strangely enjoyable for a film with "Eli Roth presents" stamped on the box. Give a clown a chance.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In the spirit of open mindedness here are three movies heading straight to DVD which I'm not going to prejudge. *The Killage* – comedy slasher from 2011 where a work outing is disrupted when it turns out one of the group is a murderous nutter. *Chastity Bites* – Elizabeth Bathory's modern-day alter-ego cultivates an abstinence club called Virginity Action Group (VAG) in a high school so she can have an endless supply of virgin blood to bathe in. Can a feisty feminist blogger crack VAG wide open? *Paranormal Extremes: Text Messages From The Dead* (only on US import) – a Las Vegas showgirl starts getting spooky texts from her dead boyfriend in a cheap looking chiller directed by the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEPHEN COLLINS



Clown's unwitting protagonist isn't the neatest of eaters.

85-year-old director of *The Astro-Zombies* and *Vixen Highway 2006: It Came From Uranus*. Yes, yes. But you never know.

REMAKE WATCH

Which of these remake "facts" is NOT true?

1) The bloke who made *Con Air* and *The Expendables 2* is remaking the already remade *The Blob* and says it's going to be more like *Alien* meets *Predator* than the original communist paranoia goofest.

2) The blokes who made *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* are attached to another *Ghostbusters* film after Paul Feig's 2016 reboot, the second of four which will cross the streams, *Avengers*-style.

3) The kid who plays Danny Dyer's son in *EastEnders* will probably play Leatherface in a new prequel by the blokes who made New French Extremist shocker *Inside*.

A: Trick question of course. They're all true, with Simon West's take on *The Blob* slated for 2016, Joe and Anthony Russo's new 'Buster currently in development and set to star Channing Tatum and Chris Pratt, and Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury's *Leatherface* currently in pre-production.

EXAM SEASON

One to look out for (out 22 May): *Spring*. It's a new indie from Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead who made the tantalising *Resolution* in 2012. It's part love story, part horror and is best watched completely cold, so instead of describing it I'm going to set you a series of essay questions. Please watch *Spring* at your earliest convenience then send your answer in 800 words or less to SFXPennyD@gmail.com.

1) *Spring* is a male fantasy equivalent of *Twilight*, in reverse and with no vampires. Discuss.

2) Which is better: money, power, knowledge, beauty, sex, love, booze, kids, zombies, mermaids, witches, kitties?

3) Lou Taylor Pucci has actually been in a load of other films including *Carriers* and the *Evil Dead* remake. How come I feel like I've literally never seen him in my life before?

4) Linklater. Lovecraft. Compare and contrast.

5) How quickly do you reckon you could learn Italian?

6) Was she married to the farm guy? Please explain.

7) WTF? Discuss. SFX

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Not all blood is virgin in *Chastity Bites...*

DREADFUL A-Z OF HORROR

Penny's monthly dictionary of doom

O IS FOR... OPEN ENDINGS

THE INNOCENTS

Jack Clayton, 1961

Gorgeous, creepy adap of Henry James' *The Turn Of The Screw* where a skittish governess believes the two little cherubs in her care are haunted by the ghosts of the lascivious former inhabitants. Or are they? One of the best examples of the "is it them or is it her?" ending – there's no certainty here and that's the beauty.

THE ORPHANAGE

JA Bayona, 2007

This Spanish language chiller owes *The Innocents* a few quid, though the ending of this tale of a mother agonising over the disappearance of her adopted son has an altogether darker finale. Or does it? Two possible explanations exist concurrently.

THE THING

John Carpenter, 1982

What is for certain in John Carpenter's icy masterpiece is that things aren't going to end well... After battling a shape-shifting being who inhabits and consumes human hosts, the final survivors must face their inability to trust each other. There's no carnage closer though – instead they get pissed and await what may come.

THE SHINING

Stanley Kubrick, 1980

There are ghosts freakin' everywhere, Halloran's been hacked to death, Jack's frozen solid in the maze and Danny and Wendy have finally escaped to freedom. Not so open-ended then. Or is it? The final photo of Jack amidst a group of party goers from 1921 changes everything. Who is he? Has he always been here? See documentary *Room 237* for mad musings galore...

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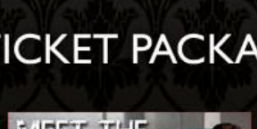

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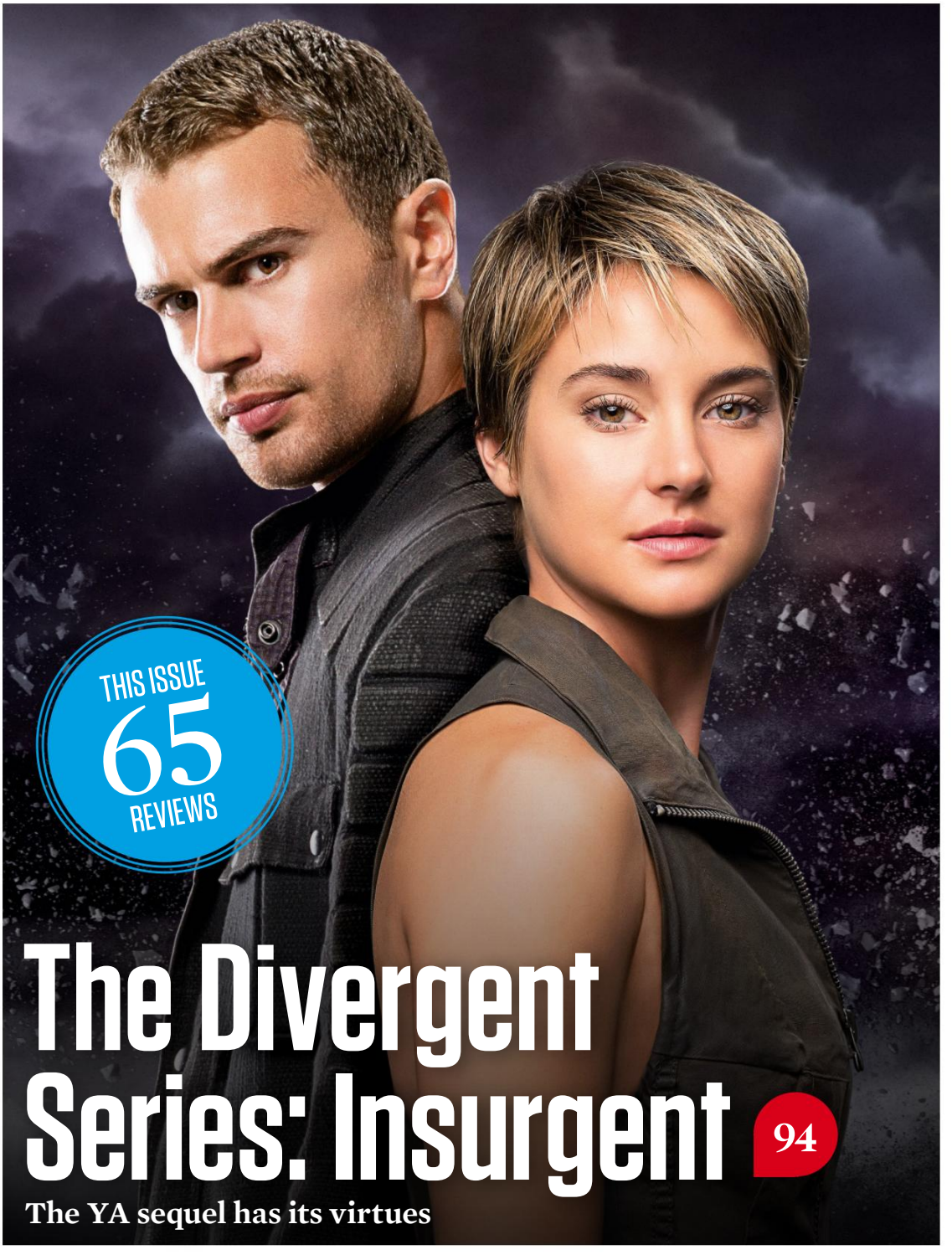
Rated

edited by Ian Berriman

The best reviews section in the universe

★★★★★ Superb ★★★★ Good ★★★ Average ★★ Poor ★ Terrible



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The YA sequel has its virtues

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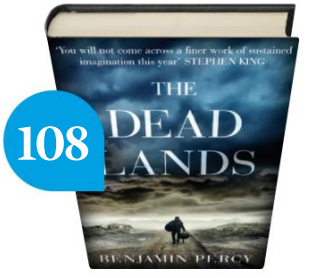
Highlights

Lost River

It got booed at Cannes, but our reviewer is much more kind to Ryan Gosling's directorial debut. We're nice people.

Interstellar

Space is big. Really big. And so is Christopher Nolan's tale of wormholes, time dilation and higher dimensions.



The Dead Lands

Take a trip across the deadly wastes of a post-apocalyptic USA in Benjamin Percy's epic novel.

Insurgent

Tris chase

★★★½☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
12A | 119 minutes
Director: Robert Schwentke
Cast: Shailene Woodley, Theo James, Kate Winslet, Naomi Watts, Miles Teller, Ansel Elgort

LAST YEAR'S *DIVERGENT* opened to lukewarm-to-negative reviews, and solid but unexciting box office. Its takings were less than half those of *Hunger Games*, to which it's often compared; both depict teen girl heroines in violent future worlds, with brutal regimes and endless fighting. It's unlikely that *Insurgent*, *Divergent*'s sequel, will pick up many new converts (like many franchises, it makes no allowance for newbie viewers), and the parallels to the *Hunger Games* films are actually more obvious this time round.

That's not to say it's a bad film. *Divergent* itself was underrated, more interesting and entertaining than many reviewers allowed. Both it and *Insurgent* are based on the YA books by Veronica Roth, set in a future Chicago that's apparently civilisation's last enclave on a ruined Earth, with society divided into factions based on virtues. The first film followed heroine Tris (Shailene Woodley) who's appalled to learn she's a "Divergent", an unclassifiable menace to society. It climaxed with a violent coup engineered by ruthless governor Jeanine (Kate Winslet), who's hellbent on exterminating Divergents. Tris survives, though both her parents die saving her.

The parallels to the *Hunger Games* films are obvious

The sequel, directed by franchise newcomer Robert Schwentke (*The Time Traveler's Wife*), carries straight on, with Tris now a fugitive together with her boyfriend Four (Theo James). Still pursued by Jeanine's goons, they hide out among various parties, none of whom seem inclined to confront Jeanine except for the Factionless, a ragtag group of social rejects led by Four's long-lost mother (Naomi Watts). Meanwhile, a centuries-old message is found in Tris's family home; Jeanine believes this will cement her power and justify her Divergent murder programme. But there's a snag. A supremely powerful Divergent is needed to open the message...

Like many of the serialised franchise films of recent years, *Insurgent* suffers for the want of a strong shape and structure. There's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, and the familiar irritant of no clear goal for much of the duration. However, this is mitigated by a series of strong character payoffs in the last act (as well as by some serviceable plot reveals); and, more importantly, by the fact that it's exciting and edgy. Whereas *Divergent* dealt with gruelling regimes of physical and mental training – more *Ender's Game* than *Hunger Games* – *Insurgent* is packed with chases and fights, often with adrenaline. One character must leap across the path of an oncoming train, while another is pursued by ninja-like attackers on zip-lines, swooping down from the night onto a skyscraper roof.

Some viewers will complain that it's all reheated leftovers. The scenes in Naomi Watts's ruined lair-base can't help but feel familiar if you saw *Mockingjay Part One* a few months back, with Watts evoking Julianne Moore's matriarch in that film. Other scenes recall *Star Trek* TV episodes of the '80s and '90s, with sterile hi-tech décor and screens, and trials in VR environments – though these allow for *Insurgent*'s most impressive, visceral images. One VR setpiece with Woodley chasing after a burning house being lifted high in the air is splendidly imagined, with the low-tech creative spirit of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*.

Throughout the film, there's a sturdy emotional strand – Tris's devastation at losing her parents, who reappear frequently to haunt her, and her fear that Jeanine's campaign is actually right; that Divergents are social menaces who leave destruction wherever they go. It may be elementary, but this strand increasingly ties the film's story together, better than many other "serial" films. (Tris's angst will also play well to the teenage demographic.) Shailene Woodley is strong again; as in *Divergent*, she plays Tris not as an iconic heroine like Katniss, but rather as an uncomfortable girl besieged by guilt, never secure with who she is –

"You were such a dick in *The Inbetweeners Movie*."

something reflected in the way she gives herself a brusque, hair-cropping makeover at the start.

Of the other characters, Theo James's Four has the usual passively reactive boyfriend role you get in this kind of film, entirely upstaged by Watts as his sinister mum. (There's a super-awkward "I love to watch him sleep" moment between mother and girlfriend, playing shamelessly to the fanbase.) Other supporting characters have good arcs, especially Miles Teller as the slithery Peter, who shifts with every breath of wind, and Ansel Elgort as Caleb, Tris's painfully useless brother. Winslet brings glamour to the film, for all her character's evilness – and Jeanine is far more hands-on nasty than *The Hunger Games*' urbane President Snow.

Indeed, *Insurgent* helps establish new, potentially controversial, levels of violence in 12A-rated films, even though that trail was blazed by *The Hunger Games* (and superhero movies like *The Dark Knight*). There were more individual violent moments in *Mockingjay* (also a 12A), but *Insurgent* has a startlingly sustained edge of viciousness and savagery, including head-butting and slamming; the shooting of unexpected characters; brainwashed youngsters throwing themselves off buildings; and Winslet herself performing deadly experiments on young test subjects, with overtones of Josef Mengele. Even the last-minute coda is violent.

The end also promises the world will change for the next film, *Allegiant Part One*. By the time that comes around the *Hunger Games* films will be over; will the *Divergent* series finally be able to emerge from Katniss Everdeen's shadow?

Andrew Osmond

? *Insurgent* author Veronica Roth is working on a duology described as "in the vein of *Star Wars*". Book one is due in 2017.

MINDPROBE

Douglas Wick

Producer of *The Divergent Series: Insurgent*

Veronica Roth's *Divergent* books are incredibly popular. Did you worry that making changes to the story would alienate the fans?
We constantly check ourselves to say that whatever adjustments we're making as the writers come in should build on, and sort of do jazz variations on, Veronica's melody. We have to make sure they're still hitting our guts the way the book does.

Was it freeing to come into this movie with your world already built?
We did a lot of work establishing it the first time, so now we get to do much more exploring and play with it. Whenever you do world building, that's the luxury of the next movie if you're successful – making the world coherent and engaging.

You also have the handy plot device of simulations that allow you to get inside your characters' heads...
It's such an opportunity. Tris is a young woman dealing with her anger and rage, and how much she can control it. She has to face the things that she's most angry about – to face Kate Winslet in the sim and try to control her anger. And then when that anger erupts, we have brilliant visual effects artists who can say, "Okay, this is what her erupting anger would be like in a sim." With computer graphics now you can do anything, so it becomes all the more important to do something specific. They make it feel exactly how rage feels from inside. **Richard Edwards**

© REX (1)

Lost River

Ryan Gosling's debut has depth

★★★★☆

Release Date: 10 April
15 | 105 minutes
Director: Ryan Gosling
Cast: Matt Smith, Christina Hendricks, Eva Mendes, Saoirse Ronan, Iain De Caestecker

It's a tough life being

beautiful. People don't want your mind, they want to put you in a box and keep you on display. That's one of the key themes of *Lost River*, but it could also be a description of the predicament Ryan Gosling faced going into his directorial debut.

Gosling could've made any mainstream film and people would've gone to see it. If he'd made a romantic drama along the lines of *The Notebook* he would have in-built audience/critical support. But he didn't. Instead, he crafted a gloriously surreal celebration of *SFX* culture, a left-leaning tribute to the working underclass of the poorest parts of America, and a collection of tributes to the directors he clearly loves.

That those directors include Mario Bava (lighting, casting Barbara Steele), David Lynch (tense musical sequences, dark tone), Terrence Malick (poetic cinematography/performances) and Terry Gilliam (*Lost River* is basically *Tideland*'s cooler brother) tells you everything about the trippy experience you'll have floating down Gosling's *River*.

We follow Bones (Iain De Caestecker), a teenager supporting his single mother by salvaging scrap from abandoned buildings, pursued by Bully (Matt Smith). But when Bones's mum gets a job in a sinister nightclub, the fight for survival really begins...

The key revelation of *River* is that Gosling's "one of us" – it's essentially a feature-length adaptation of this magazine, complete with Matt Smith as cover star. Smith is a revelation; stripped of the Doctor's charm (and hair) he's a terrifying presence.

Lost River isn't for everyone. Which partly explains why it was made to sleep with the fishes by critics in Cannes, who openly booed it. But we wonder if some of the backlash was linked to the misconception that people who look like Ryan Gosling can't be fans of the sort of films we hold dearest. It's fine for someone like Tarantino to pay homage, but Gosling? Get back in the rom-com where you belong!

Whatever the reason, it would be a shame for Gosling's debut to sink to the bottom of the sea. He's made mistakes – many first-time directors do – but this is a fascinating vision, a gorgeous film we're sure many SF fans will love. **Sam Ashurst**

Like a feature-length adaptation of this magazine

Still the buildings wouldn't talk.

? Gosling's said he was inspired by '80s fantasy films; Bully certainly feels like the kind of cruel characters we grew up hating.

Cinderella

How I Met Your Stepmother

★★★☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
U | 113 minutes
Director: Kenneth Branagh
Cast: Lily James, Richard Madden, Cate Blanchett, Helena Bonham Carter, Ben Chaplin

From Hamlet to Jack

Ryan, Kenneth Branagh has never been afraid to re-interpret iconic characters. He takes on another biggie with this live-action version of the classic fairytale – albeit in a very play-it-safe fashion. Don't expect another *Maleficent*; we're not about to see events from the point-of-view of the wicked stepmother. This spin on the story is about as adventurous as a cheese sandwich.

Still, Branagh does take a risk in the opening. Once upon a time, we would've joined Ella (*Downton Abbey*'s Lily James) with just her father (Ben Chaplin). But here, after a brief interlude of happiness when both parents are alive, Ella's mother (Hayley Atwell) passes away – sob! Then comes father's new wife, Lady Tremaine (Cate Blanchett) and her two daughters, Anastasia (Holliday Grainger) and Drizella (Sophie McShera), and before you know it, father's died too. That's a lot to take in if you're five.

Gradually ostracised and turned into a skivvy, Ella becomes Cinderella, a cruel nickname due to her sooty appearance, while bitterness swells inside Lady Tremaine – twice-widowed and now desperate for her own daughters to marry well. From hereon, you'll know the story – the prince (Richard Madden), the royal ball and so on.

Screenwriter Chris Weitz (*American Pie*) channels a warped literalism into events. Take the scene where Helena Bonham Carter's delightfully dippy fairy godmother turns the pumpkin into a golden carriage, lizards into footmen and mice into horses. Later, Weitz takes the idea to its logical conclusion: what would it be like to be inside a moving carriage changing back into a pumpkin? The result is brilliantly conceived and executed.

With Oscar winners Sandy Powell and Dante Ferretti providing costumes and production design, Branagh's vision is pure luxury – as if Harrods had swapped retail for film production. In particular, the ballroom sequence is staggering.

Credit must go to Lily James, who never lets the visuals sink her performance. There are times, particularly when the bland Madden is on screen, that the wholesomeness gets a bit much. But children will likely have a ball. **James Mottram**

It's as if Harrods had swapped retail for film production

And the next flight down also took 25 minutes.

? *Cinderella* is accompanied in cinemas by *Frozen* short "Frozen Fever"; it sees Elsa causing havoc on her sister Anna's birthday.

Chappie

RoboCop: the "cheeky blighter" years

★★★☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!

15 | 120 minutes

Director: Neill Blomkamp

Cast: Sharlto Copley, Dev Patel, Yo-Landi Visser, Ninja, Hugh Jackman

There are so many other films smashed together to make *Chappie* that it's inevitable, really, that the result is some kind of shambling, uneven Frankenstein's monster. Neill Blomkamp and fellow *District 9* co-writer Terri Tatchell have apparently transformed into magpies and collected so many shiny cinematic trinkets to lob into the script that it's almost laughable: *RoboCop*, *The Iron Giant*, *Short Circuit*, *WALL-E*, *Transformers* and, rather awkwardly, *District 9* itself – replace Chappie with one of the Prawns, add some more guns and it's extraordinarily similar.

Because so many elements are already familiar, the story consequently holds no surprises. Dev Patel's genius tech developer invents a force of robot policemen to help on the streets of Johannesburg, then manages to make one of them sentient while he's being held prisoner by street thugs Ninja and Yo-Landi (both of whom give performances so bizarre they're practically cartoon characters given flesh – not surprising, given that they're South African rap stars who have no business doing any acting). The robot, Chappie – ably voiced by Blomkamp regular Sharlto Copley as some kind of hybrid toddler/hip-hop artist – then sets about learning what's right and wrong, which is tough when your family is made up of criminals.

Add to this a gangster who's got a beef with Ninja and, in what's probably a plot twist too far, Hugh Jackman as a rival robot developer who wants to launch his own machine on the streets (it's called Moose, but basically it's an unashamedly souped-up version of *RoboCop*'s ED-209), and you've got the set-up for an entertaining coming-of-age actioner which ends, naturally, with mountains of explosions and gunfire.

So yes, *Chappie* is derivative, and you'll see every plot twist coming from so far over the horizon you'll have time to go and make a cup of tea before it arrives. But despite all of these drawbacks, it does still manage to be great fun, with astonishing effects work and energetic performances (even from those misplaced musicians, who are definitely fun to watch, if not entirely convincing). Logic might not be its strong suit, but the bunny-eared Chappie himself is a hoot. Not entirely a success, then, but you won't regret seeing it.

Jayne Nelson

But Sue should *really* have been reading *The Big Book Of Good Haircuts.*

Blomkamp cast Ninja and Yo-Landi after listening to their band, Die Antwoord, while making *Elysium*.

Hot Tub Time Machine 2

Bath To The Future

★★☆☆☆

Release Date: 10 April

15 | 93 minutes

Director: Steve Pink

Cast: Rob Corddry, Craig Robinson, Clark Duke, Adam Scott, Chevy Chase

This nit-witted sequel to an already-forgotten raunch-com omits the star-power and kitsch appeal of the original for a series of iffy "future shock" gags. In the original *Hot Tub Time Machine*, John Cusack and his idiotic friends take a dip into the titular plot device and zip back to the '80s to right a few wrongs and chase around their teenage crushes. Smartly, Cusack sits out the sequel, but the rest of the crew are back for another round of time-jumping antics.

Corddry's Lou Dorchen – inventor of billion dollar internet search engine "Lougle" – is fatally shot in the crotch during a party. The gang gets drunk and hits the hot tub to go back in time and stop the murder. Instead, they accidentally zoom 10 years into the future.

Barry's bowl of soup had very strange croutons.

Whoops. When they get there, they find that Lou's still alive. Or is he?

There are some clever moments amidst all the gunshots-to-the-balls awfulness, including a surprising and very funny cameo by Chevy Chase and a witty "What if?" end-credit sequence, but for the most part, the film clobbers you with gross ideas like a future game show where the loser endures forced anal sex. While slight, the original at least had the benefit of gratuitous '80s nostalgia and the timeless charm of Cusack. The follow-up just feels like half-baked sketch comedy.

Perhaps the funniest thing about this sequel is that it exists at all. Who asked for it? And what's next, *Sex Drive 2*? **Ken McIntyre**

Clark Duke is a big comic book fan. Recently he's been enjoying *They're Not Like Us*, *Sex Criminals* and *Satellite Sam*.

Dark Summer

★★★☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!

15 | 81 minutes

Director: Paul Solet

Banned from social media and sentenced to house arrest after hacking into a classmate's online accounts, Daniel (Keir Gilchrist) is expecting his summer to be pretty dull. But when the target of his curiosity calls him for an illicit Skype chat, things take a turn for the scary...

At heart, this is a by-the-numbers ghost story. But its feverish atmosphere amps up the ghost's menace; the constantly buzzing flies and whirring fans start to feel oppressive, until we, as viewers, want to get out of the house as much as Daniel does.

Even the relationships between the film's handful of characters are suffocating. It might seem a bit daft that arcane rituals are so easily downloadable, but when it comes to teenage obsession, *Dark Summer* isn't playing around.

Sarah Dobbs

Also Out

What a difference a day makes... in our case, it meant that we were *just* too short on time to report back from the screening of **HOME**, the animated tale of a loveable alien befriended by an Earth girl. Read our review online at **http://bit.ly/sfxreviews**. Also released during the lifespan of this here mag are three films all debuting on 24 April. You can read more about Irish horror **LET US PREY** over on page 17. Then there's strange Swedish surrealism in the shape of the magnificently titled **PIGEON SAT ON A BRANCH REFLECTING ON EXISTENCE**. But the big event is the much-anticipated arrival of **AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON**. Fingers crossed, we hope to bring you a review of that next issue – and look out for it at **http://bit.ly/sfxreviews**.

Interstellar

The Dark Night Rises

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!

2014 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

Director: Christopher Nolan

Cast: Matthew McConaughey, Anne Hathaway, Matt Damon, Michael Caine, Mackenzie Foy, David Gyasi

You wait years for a serious-minded space blockbuster, then two arrive almost at once. Following *Gravity*, a tight adventure story where people in space struggle to get back to Earth, here's Christopher Nolan's sprawling epic about astronauts seeking a new home for humanity as Earth is buried in swirling dust-storms.

Matthew McConaughey plays Cooper, an ex-pilot turned farmer in a future world that officially denies humans went to space. A ghost haunts his house and daughter Murph (Mackenzie Foy). The ghost leads Cooper to the remains of NASA and away from Earth. Together with his companions, Cooper braves wormholes, time dilation, seas and glaciers, and higher dimensions.

As he did on his Batman trilogy, Nolan sets out to make a film apart from established screen genres. Avoiding silver-suited futurism, Nolan sets much of the action in a blighted rural America where dust-clouds engulf farmhouses and cornfields, drawing on *The Grapes Of Wrath* and the paintings of Andrew Wyeth. In talking heads interludes taken from a 2012 documentary, elderly survivors of the "Dust Bowl" years in '30s America talk about their memories of the time, embedding *Interstellar*'s imagined future in the historic past.

Interstellar makes it easy to turn off one's critical faculties and just enjoy the bigness

Like *Gravity*, *Interstellar* feels like a battle between audience-friendly Hollywood and the coldly rational underpinnings of hard SF. On the one hand, the film conveys the terrifying vastness and loneliness of space. The image of the tiny human vessel crawling through the void might have impressed Kubrick. He'd surely have liked the film's most stupendous image, of a sea humping up into mountain-sized waves on a world where neither land nor life belong.

And yet the film also insists on staying with its story of one cosmically separated family. Anne Hathaway's scientist may make Werner Herzog-like statements about the indifferent universe ("Is a tiger evil because it rips a gazelle to pieces?") but she later talks of love as a *Star Wars*-style force. Cooper's journey leads us to a circular-logic ending which feels like *2001*'s stargate reimagined by an especially soppy Spielberg. The timey-wimey handwaving and dubious character resolutions could have been written by Steven Moffat.

Other problems, though, are obviously Nolan's. Multiple repetitions of Dylan Thomas's poem "Do not go gentle into that good night" soon get laughably portentous, much like the closing speech in *The Dark Knight*. Even before that sub-stargate ending, the film runs short of steam. The last act has long anticlimactic sequences which aren't exciting or interesting, for all the brawling on glaciers, breathless intercutting between different worlds, and best attempts by composer Hans Zimmer to ramp up the suspense.

Their fellow astronauts didn't believe in wearing spacesuits.

And yet for all its disappointments, *Interstellar* makes it easy to turn off one's critical faculties and just enjoy the bigness: the waves, the glaciers, the cornfields, the whole super-sized package.

Extras: The DVD is vanilla, with the extras exclusive to the Blu-ray (rated). They include 13 making-of featurettes, plus a longer documentary, "The Science Of *Interstellar*".

Viewers who watch bonuses for candid footage and comments from the actors may be disappointed. *Interstellar*'s extras are much more about the technical challenges and visualising the science, which makes for dry viewing at times. Still, there's a lovely comment from Michael Caine, whose character writes huge equations on a blackboard: Caine confesses that when he talked to the physicist Kip Thorne, who supplied the real science, he was lost three sentences in!

It was Thorne's equations that determined how the wormhole and the black hole were visualised in the

film, the first as a marble-like sphere in space, the second as blackness surrounded by a gargantuan blazing halo. The documentary does a fair job of exploring these topics, as well as time travel, relativity, the search for habitable planets and the Dust Bowl catastrophe of the '30s which inspired *Interstellar*'s future. However, some of this material gets repeated in the shorter featurettes.

One of the best of these is "Cosmic Sounds", about the creation of Hans Zimmer's music, dominated by a giant London church organ which exhales its music. Zimmer began his score thinking it was for a father-son drama, not a space odyssey; true to his vision, Nolan didn't want *Interstellar* to have a genre soundtrack. The music developed through the film's production, each shaping the other.

Other featurettes highlight Nolan's practice of filming as much as he can for real. In the studio, we see spaceships being turned on massive gimbals. When the Endurance manoeuvres through space, you're often looking at a near life-sized prop being filmed with real lighting. The blocky robot character TARS was frequently a heavyweight prop too, worked with rods by comedian Bill Irwin, who also supplied TARS's voice. Even the abstract, surreal Tesseract environment was partly a giant physical set, with McConaughey hanging in a harness. Iceland, formerly Bruce Wayne's training ground in Nolan's *Batman Begins*, doubled as *Interstellar*'s water world (an endless delta) and ice world (a glacier). And if you're wondering why the ice world looks rather black, that's residue from Iceland's 2010 volcanic eruption – the one which stopped all the planes!

Andrew Osmond

? A Limited Edition Blu-ray comes with a 48-page booklet, featuring material from the book *Interstellar: Beyond Time And Space*.

BLACK HOLE FUN

Four more science fiction singularities

DOCTOR WHO, "THE THREE DOCTORS"
1972-1973

The Time Lords owe their mighty powers to the Eye of Harmony, the nucleus of a black hole created by stellar engineer Omega. In *Who*'s tenth anniversary team-up, the Second and Third Doctors journey through the event horizon into an anti-matter universe shaped by the vengeful Gallifreyan's will. It looks pretty much like Cromer.

INTO INFINITY
1975

Shot by Gerry Anderson in-between seasons of *Space: 1999*, this one-off special/unsuccessful pilot aimed to introduce kids to concepts like the theory of relativity. BRIAN BLESSED is among the crew of a faster-than-light vessel that ultimately passes through a black hole into a parallel universe where space is *blue*, not black.

EVENT HORIZON
1997

Hey, you! Don't fit a gravity drive which generates artificial black holes to power your spaceship. You'll probably just create a gateway into a hell dimension, leaving your ship with an evil mind of its own – and the ability to torment anyone on board with horrifying hallucinations. Which is really annoying.

STAR TREK
2009

Black holes can also be used for time travel, as Nero discovers when one flings him back 25 years. They can also be weaponised, as the narked Romulan demonstrates when he spanks Spock for failing to save his homeworld by generating one deep inside Vulcan. Why he doesn't just send Spock a text reading, "Get your pointy-eared ass to Romulus earlier!", lord only knows.

The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies

Fact: battles make everything better

★★★★½ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Release Date: 20 April
2014 | 12A | Blu-ray/DVD/download (6 April)
Director: Peter Jackson
Cast: Martin Freeman, Richard Armitage, Ian McKellen, Luke Evans, Cate Blanchett

During one of the featurettes on this release, Peter Jackson proudly proclaims of *The Battle Of The Five Armies*, "I think it's the best of the three." It's hard to disagree with him. Out of his trilogy of much-maligned, over-padded *Hobbit* films, this is definitely the one that's the most solid, bolstered as it is by energetic, engaging battle scenes, a magnetic performance from Richard Armitage's gone-bonkers Thorin and the thrilling sight of Smaug the dragon on a fiery rampage.

Sure, there are issues. There's a pointless comedy subplot about the Master of Lake-town's aide which never seems to end. Given that more than a decade has passed since the end of the first trilogy – eons in technology years – it's bizarre that the CGI looks worse than that in *The Lord Of The Rings*. And Martin Freeman's Bilbo, always the heart of Tolkien's book, doesn't get much to do – although he still does it so well that your heart may break when his does.

But there's also a lot to love. To offset all the Dwarf/Elf melodrama we see Luke Evans come into his own as the human, Bard, who takes things so seriously he's basically this trilogy's Aragorn. Those aforementioned battles are bloody delicious: who knew that Billy Connolly riding a pig would be one of the trilogy's highlights? And there's something so deliciously Shakespearean about Thorin's plight that you almost expect him to wonder if he should "be or not be" when the arrows of outrageous fortune fly in from those Elves. Armitage's performance is Oscar-worthy, although such accolades are probably a sore point, given this film's insulting single nomination for Sound Editing (remember how *The Return Of The King* won 11 statuettes? How times have changed...).

The journey – long and meandering though it was – is ultimately worth it

Of course, the fact this final film is rather good may not sway those of you who bailed halfway through the first. But it's a shame to write off this trilogy as a whole, because the journey – long and meandering though it was – is ultimately worth it. Plus, you can't diminish what the filmmakers have achieved with these six movies. As Jackson also says in the extras: "It's become a *lifestyle*, more than just a job." It's a way of life we will sorely miss.

Extras: There are roughly 50 minutes of behind-the-scenes featurettes included here; as usual, if you want more to find more to chew on, you'll have to wait for the extended edition, out later this year (date TBC). The adorable 11-minute featurette "Recruiting The Five Armies" takes a look at the life of an extra in Lake-town, and will leave you wishing you'd been there to enjoy all the fun; the near 20-minute "Completing Middle-earth" explores how the *Hobbit* films tie in closely with the *Rings* trilogy, maybe even bringing up some points you've never even considered (note how Gandalf's dragon firework in *Fellowship* performs the same manoeuvre as Smaug in this film...). A piece about Billy Boyd's end credits song is pretty interesting, and you get the video of it too. Finally, there's another "New Zealand: Home Of Middle-earth" featurette to round things off. **Jayne Nelson**

Archie the archery teacher knew he had a very keen class this year.

? The lyrics for Billy Boyd's "The Last Goodbye" were written by writer/producer Philippa Boyens in a bathroom.

Knight at the museum.

Night At The Museum: Secret Of The Tomb

The exhibits are revolting

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Release Date: 13 April
2014 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD
Director: Shawn Levy
Cast: Ben Stiller, Dan Stevens, Rebel Wilson, Owen Wilson, Steve Coogan, Ben Kingsley

The third *Night At The Museum* film starts with an excavation straight out of *Indiana Jones*, as if it's going to break the usual formula. Nope – it turns into another workmanlike, effects-laden pantomime, as Ben Stiller's put-upon hero travels to the British Museum to fix the magic tablet which brings statues and waxworks to rowdy life.

The second film was lifted by Hank Azaria and Amy Adams, but sadly neither is back. Newcomers include *Downton Abbey*'s Dan Stevens, who's reasonably spirited as a bluff Sir Lancelot, and Rebel Wilson, naff as a security guard. (There are also agreeable cameos from Ben Kingsley and a couple of surprise guests.) Otherwise it's the normal *Museum* ensemble, mostly dragged around with little to do – including Robin Williams, in one of his last films.

It's a mix of mild tedium – especially when it comes to Stiller's character's parenting issues – and inspired ideas. There's a wondrous fantasy parade which goes terribly wrong, and a superb fight inside an Escher painting, with shades of *Labyrinth*.

Extras: Buy the DVD and you get a featurette on the film's comedy, deleted scenes, a gallery and trailers. The Blu-ray (rated) adds commentary by the director, another six featurettes, and more deleted scenes. **Andrew Osmond**

? The film ends with a dedication to both Mickey Rooney (security guard Gus) and Robin Williams: "Magic Never Ends".

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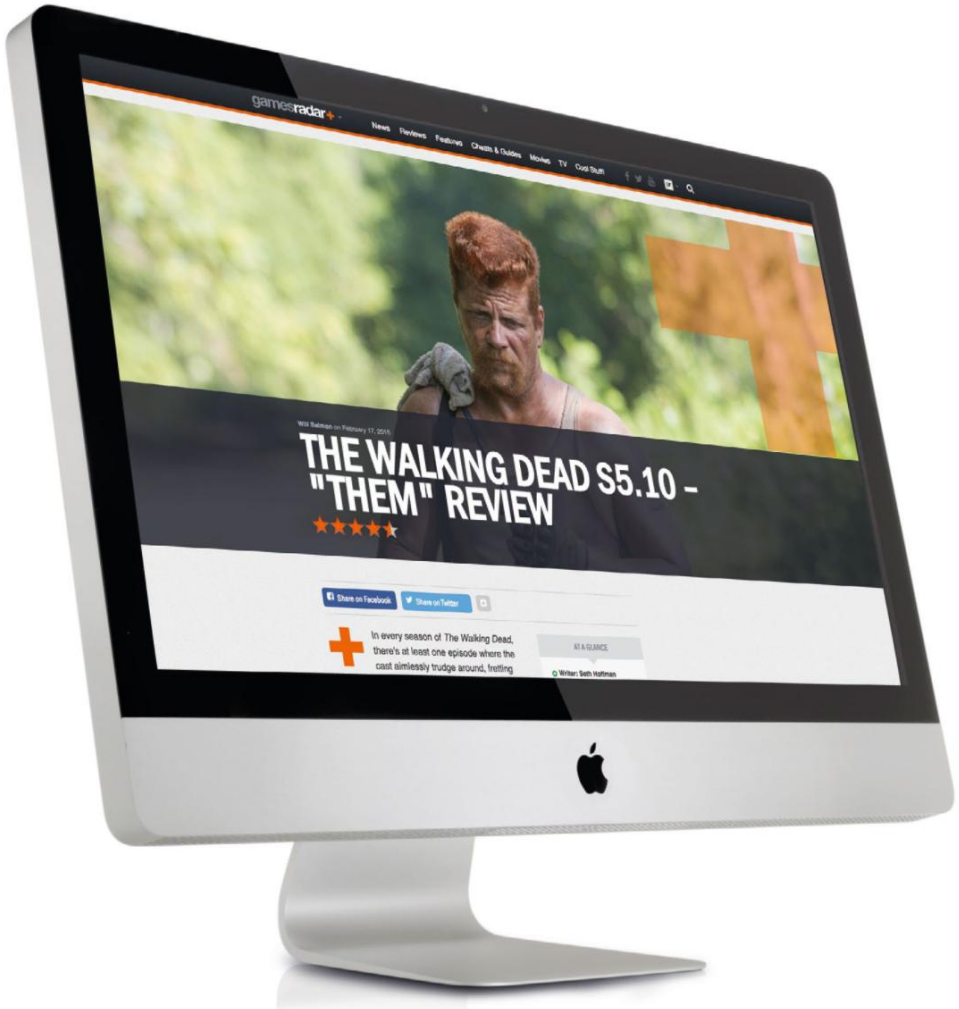

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What We Do In The Shadows

Undead funny

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

Release Date: 13 April
2014 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
Directors: Taika Waititi, Jemaine Clement
Cast: Jemaine Clement, Taika Waititi, Jonathan Brugh, Cori Gonzalez-Macuer, Stuart Rutherford, Ben Fransham

Taking two tired subgenres (vampires and the mockumentary), and giving both a much-needed shot in the arm, *What We Do In The Shadows* plunges a hilarious stake into bloodsucker lore. Set in Wellington, New Zealand, it's a faux fly-on-the-wall doc about four flatsharing vamps trying to fit into the 21st century world.

So far, so *Being Human* – and there are plenty of parallels with the ace BBC Three series, from the protagonists' desire to be normal (-ish), to the vamps' uneasy relationship with werewolves. The difference is that this is laugh-out-loud funny from start to finish.

Co-directors/writers/stars Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi nail the mock-doc format as well as anybody has since *This Is Spinal Tap*. They opt to play it straight, revelling in the mundanity of the vamps' existence, while allowing gags to flow effortlessly from the perfectly formed characters and situations. As Viago, Vladislav, Deacon and Petyr struggle to recapture their glory days from centuries before, the movie has fun subverting all the old clichés.

But the main reason the film works is that, for all their brutal blood lust, there's something incredibly human and vulnerable about the vampires. They're likeable, and just want to be loved – reality TV stars that the public would readily take to their hearts.

Gags flow effortlessly from the situations

"I've bought some brand new toothpaste though."

Extras: Lots of extra footage here – in the form of deleted scenes (27 minutes), extended character interviews (18 minutes) and more – but not much that actually adds to the movie. You get a structureless behind-the-scenes doc (18 minutes), Viago and Vlad's trip to the real-life Transylvania (four minutes), and the original 27-minute short that inspired the movie. **Richard Edwards**

? Clement and Taika first played with these themes years ago, in a routine where Taika's vamp character heckled Clement's.

The Pyramid

Stalk Like An Egyptian

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

Release Date: 13 April
2014 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
Director: Grégory Levasseur
Cast: Ashley Hinshaw, Denis O'Hare, James Buckley, Daniel Amerman, Amir K

Not *another* mummy film? No, actually. Though formulaic, *The Pyramid* is slightly more original than that, instead spinning scares from the ancient Egyptians' pantheon of gods.

Set inside a pyramid buried hundreds of feet underground, it has more in common with spelunking shocker *The Descent* than Stephen Sommers' bandaged franchise. A father/daughter archaeologist team, their tech guy and a documentary crew are picked off by two different threats: small, scurrying somethings, and a bigger beast that yanks people into crawl-spaces like it's been watching *Alien* and taking notes.

The found-footage format is used intermittently, regularly set aside in favour of an omniscient POV. That's perhaps for the best, as the guy behind the camera, *The Inbetweeners*' James Buckley, is one of the film's strong points. Serving as the audience's proxy, he talks a lot of common sense, although the role does steer so close to TV persona Jay that you worry he might start cracking gags about "clunge".

"I love a good shaft."

Unfortunately, the script never manages to make sense of its enclosed eco-system, certain plot details go nowhere, and while the CGI monster effects might have passed muster a decade ago, they look pretty ropey in 2015. There are a couple of decent jolts, but you won't be left crying for mummy.

Extras: Four brief promo pieces (six minutes); an extended ending; a gallery. **Ian Berriman**

? James Buckley's dad let him watch *An American Werewolf In London* when he was four. "My Mum went mental."

The Samurai

Coming-out carnage

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Release Date: 13 April
2014 | 15 | DVD
Director: Till Kleinert
Cast: Michel Diercks, Pit Bukowski, Uwe Preuss, Kaja Blachnik

This German film is equally likely to impress, bewilder, or – depending on your interpretation of the subtext – affront.

It centres on Jakob (Michel Diercks), a rural cop who gets no respect from the locals, spends his evenings playing cards with grandma and, it's subtly implied, is sexually unfulfilled. A wolf is prowling the area... and so is a Samurai sword-wielding bloke in a white dress, carving a swathe of criminal damage through the neighbourhood. The extended pursuit that follows transforms into both a dance and a seduction, as it becomes increasingly apparent that Jakob's repressed urges have somehow been physically manifested.

It's the sort of film whose ambiguity attracts some violently opposing readings. The intention seems clear: a celebration of ignoring the conservative societal forces holding you back and liberating the real you. But you could take away the "message" that men should eradicate their feminine side and embrace violence.

Vincent Price must be around somewhere.

Either way, there's some attractive use of red and blue giallo lighting, Dario Argento-style. And Pit Bukowski burns brightly as Jakob's transvestite anima/animus, flashing a razor-slash Alex-the-droog smile that's as powerful a weapon as the character's katana.

Extras: Commentary by director Till Kleinert, an interview with Kleinert, Diercks and Bukowski (20 minutes), and a behind-the-scenes look (10 minutes). **Ian Berriman**

? During casting, Michel Diercks (Jakob) had to dance to "Into The Night" from *Twin Peaks*; his performance was the clincher.

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BLU-RAY DEBUT

The Wings Of Honneamise

The Not-Quite-Right Stuff

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

Release Date: 27 April

1987 | PG | Dual-format Blu-ray & DVD/DVD

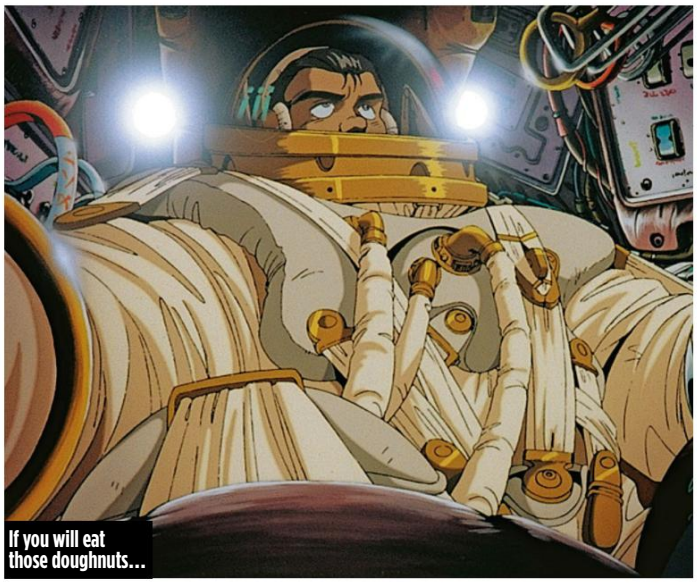
Director: Hiroyuki Yamaga

Cast: Bryan Cranston, David Thomas, Patricia Ja Lee, Michael Frost, Dan Woren

USUALLY WHEN A film is described as a flawed classic, the flaw isn't debilitating. It's an annoyance, a shame, a mistake that irritates, but you can still enjoy the film as a whole. *The Wings Of Honneamise*, though, has one moment after which it's impossible to watch the film in the same frame of mind, and which leaves you with a bitter taste at the end completely at odds with a climax that's clearly supposed to be spiritually uplifting.

For much of its running time, *The Wings Of Honneamise* is a visually impressive anime, with crossover appeal for Western arthouse film fans. It's set on an alternate 20th century Earth dominated by two great power blocs. One of them is developing a space programme in the face of disinterest from politicians and outright ridicule from the public. But as the project nears a successful launch, the other superpower starts to take notice.

There is action, but not until late in the film, when all-out war erupts. Before that it's more like a bamboo-punk version of *The Right Stuff* directed by the Coen Brothers: talky, character-lead and full of wry – and occasionally very black – humour. There are also interesting issues raised about the morality of spending money on space exploration when there's so much suffering to deal with back here on Earth. The animation, from a pre-CG age, is gorgeous, with some moments of almost impressionistic beauty.


If you will eat those doughnuts...

Then the film's hero – Shiro, this world's potential first astronaut – attempts to rape a woman. Worse still, the next day she apologises to him for leading him on... *with a smile*. This seems to spur in him a religious conversion that ultimately vindicates the cost of the space programme. Online, you can find some people trying to justify this scene (there's a hint he may have thought she was a prostitute, as if that makes it any better); it is, however, unjustifiable and not even seriously addressed within the film.

It's too shocking a character development for the plot development it drives, and afterwards it's impossible to empathise with Shiro. Flawed heroes can be interesting, but not this flawed.

EXTRAS: Just trailers. The "Collector's Edition" Blu-ray also has a 20-page booklet. **Dave Golder**

We've stuck with the film's best known title, but this release is being sold as *Royal Space Force: The Wings Of Honneamise*.

Hemlock Grove Season Two

Growing pains

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

Release Date: 20 April

2014 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

Creators: Brian McGreevy, Lee Shipman

Cast: Famke Janssen, Bill Skarsgård, Landon Liboiron, Dougray Scott, Tiio Horn, Joel de la Fuente

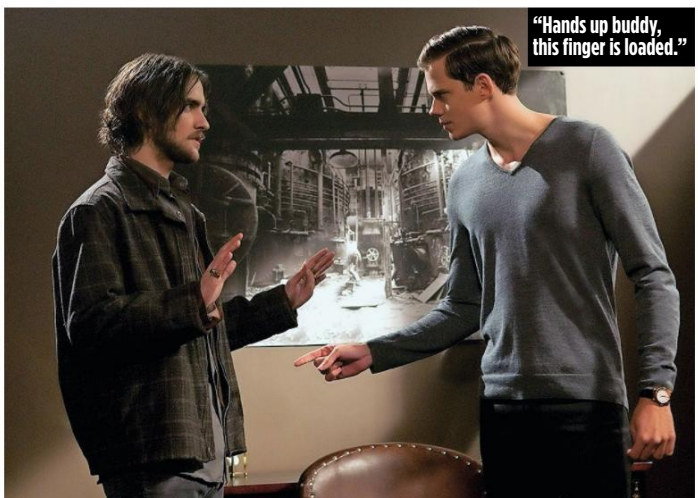
AS NETFLIX'S only original SF offering BM (before Marvel) in a slate of critically acclaimed shows, how disappointing that *Hemlock Grove* is the online streamers' black sheep. No one's going to be calling it the next *House Of Cards* anytime soon, but season two is a definite step up from the ropey first year.

Again the format is part murder mystery, part supernatural soap opera. The mystery here revolves around a masked cult killing seemingly random young 'uns, and the cryptic dreams werewolf Peter and vampire Roman have warning them of the next murder. Elsewhere mad matriarch Olivia spends the season wallowing after losing her vamp powers, Shelley prepares for a life-changing procedure at the White Tower and new girl Miranda Cates finds herself strangely drawn to Roman's baby.

Hemlock Grove is not a show to do things by halves, and those brutal werewolf transformations are only the start of it. The gore, boundaries of taste and laws of logic are pushed even further this year; it's also still a melodrama at heart, so expect some dubious dialogue and performances. But characters are better fleshed out, the plotting more tightly focused and the ideas more outlandish than ever.

Crucially, it's always fun – something the frequently boring first season couldn't claim to be. The third and final season airs on Netflix in a couple of months; at this rate there's every chance *Hemlock Grove* could end on a surprising high.

EXTRAS: None. **Jordan Farley**


"Hands up buddy, this finger is loaded."

DRINKING GAME

DRINK FROM A FRESHLY-BITTEN NECK EVERY TIME...

- Olivia and Roman have a blatantly incestuous exchange.
- It's revealed that someone isn't who they say they are.
- An incongruous dubstep track plays over an action sequence.
- Olivia does something uncharacteristically nice (finish the bottle when she sings karaoke).
- Roman's child goes all *Rosemary's Baby*.
- Norman turns up in a grump.
- There's a homoerotic moment between Peter and Roman.
- Someone tries to do something nice for Shelley, only for it to go horribly wrong.
- Roman's house staff are mean to Miranda for no reason.

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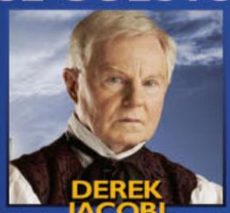

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BLU-RAY DEBUT

The Blob

Steve McQueen in a jam

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★☆☆☆☆

Release Date: 20 April

1958 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

Director: Irvin S Yeaworth

Cast: Steve McQueen, Aneta Corsaut, Earl Rowe, Olin Howland, Stephen Chase

Considering this film's title, there really isn't that much Blob in it. People *talk* about the Blob at great length, but budget limitations mean that the titular mass doesn't occupy much screen time. Which is a shame, because it's the best thing here.

The plot is fairly routine '50s monster movie antics, and it's slow to properly get going (following the world's most inappropriate theme song for a horror film). Some glutinous alien material lands in a Pennsylvania town and attaches itself to a farmer. He dies, and this alerts the world's oldest teenager (Steve McQueen in his film debut, aged 28 but playing 17) to the threat. In scene after scene he attempts to convince the sceptical authorities that trouble's afoot.

And that's the main problem with this film: too much of it is teens trying to tell adults that the town's being attacked. Who cares? We *know* they're telling the truth. What a waste of time! There's not a lot going on to test the grey matter.

What *The Blob* does have on its side is its '50s small-town Americana – diners, "movie theaters", chunky automobiles – and the giant globule of raspberry jam itself, all brightly coloured, especially on this HD edition. The scene where it invades a cinema is memorable, although it brings a truth home: there's not really that much Blob.

Extras: The original trailer for the film ("Starring Steve McQueen and a cast of exciting young people!") plus five short photo galleries.

Russell Lewin

A film poster outside the cinema bears the title *The Vampire And The Robot*, but is actually the one for *Forbidden Planet*.

House viewings were always edgy when Frank was around.

BLU-RAY DEBUT

The Ghoul

Ye olde Brit horror

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Release Date: 20 April

1933 | PG | Blu-ray

Director: T Hayes Hunter

Cast: Boris Karloff, Cedric Hardwicke, Ernest Thesiger, Dorothy Hyson, Anthony Bushell, Ralph Richardson

Once thought lost, *The Ghoul* has some significance as the first British horror film with sound, and for featuring Boris Karloff, back from Hollywood hot off the success of *Frankenstein* and *The Mummy*. It's an antediluvian effort, but this HD transfer plays up its better qualities.

Karloff plays a dying Egyptologist who makes his servant bandage a sacred jewel in his hand, hoping that it'll cause him to rise from the tomb after he pops his clogs. The jewel is stolen – but that doesn't stop the dead man from waking up, and now that he's miffed he goes on a bloody rampage, picking off some of the many folk now wandering around his Old Dark House.

The Ghoul is a mixed bag: what still impresses is the expressionist photography by Austrian veteran Gunther Krampf and much of the set design – particularly an office that's like something out of a Dr Seuss nightmare. Less captivating is the script, which allows a gaggle of stage actors to wander in and out of repetitive scenes, rabbiting in eccentric fashion as they go. Much of it is tiresome, confused and silly – and the comic relief from actress Kathleen Harrison grates rather.

Karloff doesn't have much screen time and that's a pity, but when he does, particularly after his resurrection, the king of horror makes it count: those striking features demand attention.

Extras: An affectionate and informed commentary from journalists Kim Newman and Stephen Jones, plus a picture gallery. **Russell Lewin**

One of *The Ghoul*'s writers was Ronald Pertwee, father of Third Doctor Jon Pertwee and grandfather of *Gotham*'s Sean Pertwee.

Round-up

BEN-TO

Release Date: OUT NOW!

2011 | 15 | DVD

Anime's never short of crazy ideas, but *Ben-To*'s high concept is a whopper. In this 12-part series, warrior tribes fight ferocious gravity-defying battles... for bargain meals in Tokyo supermarkets! Yes, really. The fights play like *Scott Pilgrim* in a grocery store, with chopsticks particularly to the fore, though it helps if you've seen other zany anime, like *Good Luck Girl!*, to get the show's wavelength. It's broad slapstick, full of stock situations and schoolkids, but many gags hit home and the absurdism lifts it up. As in *American Pie*, the wish-fulfilment eye-candy of the cute/sexy girls is balanced (a bit) by the painful humiliations of the schoolboy hero.

THE BOGEYMAN

Release Date: OUT NOW!

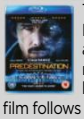
1980 | 18 | Blu-ray

German director Ulli Lommel was a regular collaborator with Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Banned as a video nasty for a few years, his 1980 horror is now making its UK Blu-ray debut. Twenty years on from stabbing his mum's bullying boyfriend to death, a guy and his sister are terrorised by a vengeful spirit contained within a mirror which "witnessed" the killing. The supernatural backstory makes this an interestingly atypical slasher (though Halloween was clearly an influence, so were *The Exorcist* and *The Amityville Horror*), plus there are some effectively creepy ideas (once the mirror's broken, shards of it induce people to suicide) and pleasingly gruesome deaths.

PREDESTINATION

Release Date: OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

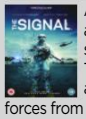


The release of this Robert Heinlein adaptation was announced too late for us to run a larger review – a shame, because we rather liked it. The film follows the original 1958 short story pretty closely, but adds an additional bonkers twist. Ethan Hawke plays a bartender listening to a guy's tragic life story; he, it emerges, was formerly a she, and the bartender's actually a temporal agent out to recruit him. We said: "An increasingly jaw-dropping tale of temporal paradox, presented with considerable noirish period style", but noted, "Brought to life by flesh and blood actors, the story's perverse central premise becomes a whole lot harder to swallow."

THE SIGNAL

Release Date: OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | DVD



A pair of MIT students driving across the US are lured to a spooky shack in the desert. There they are quarantined and monitored by unseen forces from behind two-way glass. Suffering mysterious physical ailments, they're told by Laurence Fishburne's interrogator that they're contaminated... We said: "Slips elegantly from genre to genre, beginning as an impressionistic road movie, seguing into paranoid sci-fi, then morphing into something completely unhinged. The three leads give smart, sensitive performances throughout the weirdness, aided by a gorgeous score, Malick-alike cinematography, and some extraordinary practical effects."

Da Vinci's Demons Series Two

Leo goes all Indiana Jones

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

Release Date: 27 April
2014 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
Creator: David S Goyer
Cast: Tom Riley, Laura Haddock, Elliot Cowan, Gregg Chillin, Blake Ritson

The first series of *Da Vinci's Demons* introduced the idea of the young Leo being some kind of Renaissance MacGyver with personality issues, helping the Medicis defend Florence from a dodgy Pope with his elaborate mechanical miracles. It was very silly, and, on the whole, decent enough escapist fluff.

Perversely, season two decides to separate Da Vinci from the Medicis for the majority of episodes, sending him off to the New World to act like some bipolar Indiana Jones, searching for lost treasures, and hallucinating feverishly every other scene. Lorenzo de Medici, meanwhile, is in the midst of *Game Of Thrones*-style intrigue and

politicking, with gruesome death only ever a betrayal away.

The latter is far more interesting than the former, leaving the show in the odd situation of having its star stuck in the scenes you're least looking forward to. It doesn't help that Riario, the delightfully devious papal henchman of the first series, is also stuck in South America.

The Italian-based plotlines may be a little heavy on "parent issues" and people festering in cells but Elliot Cowan is superb throughout as the beleaguered Duke Lorenzo. And when Leo does make it back to Europe, out-going showrunner David S Goyer leaves his successor one hell of a cliffhanger.

Extras: Four short featurettes. **Dave Golder**

Two episodes this season were helmed by Charles Sturridge, the man who directed TV landmark *Brideshead Revisited*.

Exists

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Release Date: 6 April
2014 | 15 | DVD

Another found-footage Bigfoot flick? These buggers are breeding in the woods...

This one's directed by Eduardo Sanchez, who pretty much created the whole camcordersploitation genre with 1999's *The Blair Witch Project*. It feels crushingly overfamiliar: kids discover woodland cabin, point GoPro camera at trees, become Sasquatch bait. As characters they're ciphers floating free of backstory, given to declaring, "It was fucking Bigfoot, dude!" as if the film's about to tip into self-parody at any moment.

Bigfoot himself impresses, but he's a man in a monkey suit compared to the brilliantly abstract shivers of *Blair Witch*. And Sanchez's directorial tricks, once so fresh, so startling, feel tired in the age of Vine and YouTube.

Extras: Making Of; featurette; deleted scenes. **Nick Setchfield**

Mankind's Last Stand

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

Release Date: 20 April
2015 | 15 | DVD

Although marketed as a found-footage feature, *Mankind's Last Stand* can be more accurately filed under "mockumentary". Following a platoon of gum-chewin' American GIs across Afghanistan and Pakistan as they go head to head with the last remnants of an alien invasion force, the movie flashes between kinetic, CGI-drenched shoot-'em-ups and standard talking head monologues.

Director Jabbar Raisani uses the Middle Eastern setting to make some clunky parallels with the War on Terror, but the flimsy rent-a-grunt characterisation and weakness for military movie clichés mean that the film never manages to transcend its cash-strapped budget.

Extras: Making Of; deleted scenes. **Steve O'Brien**

The Atticus Institute

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
2013 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

There's a distinct whiff of late-night telly about *The Atticus Institute*. Presented as a documentary, it tracks down the scientists who studied a case of demonic possession back in the '70s. It's not hard to imagine channel hopping and landing on this.

It's pretty convincing, too, using grainy still photographs and decaying video footage to supply vintage jump scares. The only problem, really, is that we've seen this kind of narrative too many times for any of it to be surprising; the gurning and growling of the possessed woman is all par for the course. More interesting is the government conspiracy angle, but though that's well-observed, it never quite manages to be scary.

Extras: Nine minutes of behind-the-scenes chat. **Sarah Dobbs**

Halo: Nightfall

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
2014 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

Originally broadcast weekly, *Halo: Nightfall*'s episodic origins aren't apparent in this feature-length version. Future Luke Cage Mike Colter stars as Locke, an ONI operative tasked with tracking down a bio-weapon on a ruined Halo ring. The fatal daylight temperatures are the least of his concerns – something even deadlier is on the surface.

Anyone invested in the games will get the most out of *Nightfall*. It's primarily an origin story for Agent Locke – a key character in the next *Halo* game – bolted onto a *Pitch Black*-lite plot. It's well made though, boasting solid creative talent behind the scenes, creepy creature effects and a charismatic turn from Colter. Worth a watch if you know the difference between Cortana and a kebab.

Extras: Numerous featurettes and short films. **Jordan Farley**

The Device

TOXIC WASTE

★☆☆☆☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
2014 | 15 | DVD

The cover art for *The Device* suggests something cyberpunky. It's nothing of the sort. The "device" is just a large black marble, while the general tone of this low-budget horror is "dullest episode of *The X-Files* ever".

While competently shot, and acted with a commitment way beyond the call of duty, there's no disguising the script's conveyor belt of clichés. A dispiritingly over-familiar tale of estranged sisters, a cabin in the woods, a rape that's actually aliens, a possessed boyfriend and alien greys who inexplicably hang around in forests giving women nightmares, it's also immensely dull. You can probably work out the plot – and the "twist" – from that description alone.

There aren't even any decent gore or effective horror moments to redeem it. Utterly tedious.

Extras: None. **Dave Golder**

Zombie Resurrection

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
2015 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

There's a fairly original idea at the heart of this zombie sort-of-comedy. It's 458 days into the apocalypse and a band of mismatched survivors are trudging through the English countryside. It's all going about as well as you'd expect until they stumble upon an abandoned shelter and encounter – wait for it – Zombie Jesus.

An undead messiah is a fun concept. Unfortunately, it's not particularly developed, or even give much screen time. Instead, the movie is mostly content to shuffle decrepitly through a series of zombie clichés. The production values are solid, but the jokes mostly amount to people shouting "fuck" while "funny" music plays. A bit of a missed opportunity.

Extras: A solid half-hour Making Of and a trailer. **Will Salmon**

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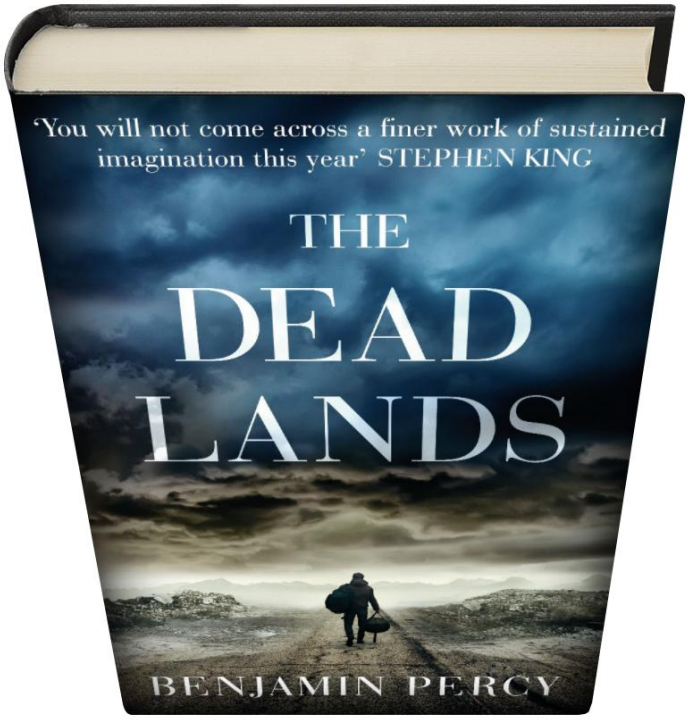


The Dead Lands

Violence! Mutants! Owls!

★★★★☆

Release Date: 9 April
400 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author: Benjamin Percy
Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton

Tales of life after civilisation's end are getting more common every day, and one downside of this popularity explosion is a major dose of over-familiarity. You can switch around the adversaries and the problems to overcome, but whether the protagonists face zombies, vampires or just ordinary people pushed into savagery, post-apocalypse fiction is in danger of seeming a little repetitive.

Author Benjamin Percy comes up with an interesting potential solution in his latest novel. The apocalypse in *The Dead Lands* may be pretty standard – a deadly virus, with added nuclear devastation – but this gritty tale of a future USA turns out to have more in common with mythic fantasies like Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series than it does with *The Walking Dead*.

The book depicts a world that has descended into a near-medieval existence. In the walled city of St Louis, now called the Sanctuary, the inhabitants live under the tyrannical rule of the Mayor. Then, the first outsider seen for decades arrives from out of the "Dead Lands" – a young girl named Gawea, who claims to have come from a healthy, established community on the west coast. Seeing a threat to his power, the Mayor orders her execution, but a group of Sanctuary rebels have other ideas. One daring rescue later, the rebels and the girl set off on an epic journey across the continent, voyaging through the lethal wastelands towards what they hope is a better life.

It's here that the novel really hits its stride, turning into a pulpy reimagining of the historical Lewis and Clark expedition across America, and it's a portrait of a ruined world that's both lurid and compelling.

As the novel progresses, it switches regularly between the desperate travels of the rebels and the ever-worsening situation in Sanctuary, exploring the characters in depth while also shaking things up with moments of savage, unpredictable violence. However, it's the fantastical edge that Percy adds to the story that really grabs the attention, giving a typically bleak set-up an evocative sense of mystery and magic.

Right from the early sequence where a mechanical owl makes its first appearance, *The Dead Lands* is unapologetic about its pulp fantasy roots, and Percy makes the novel's stranger moments impactful and majestic, while also preventing the sense of sprawl that occasionally derailed his previous genre thriller *Red Moon*. Instead, he keeps the focus on the two main plot threads, and brings a weight and realism to the characters, making the book a propulsive and often gripping read.

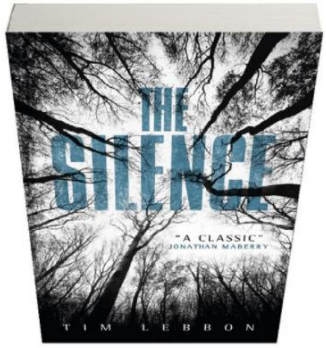
Written in sharp, jagged prose that's just as strong evoking landscapes as it is tackling the vivid action sequences, the book has so many effective moments that it's rather frustrating when problems do finally develop. Percy's approach to the apocalypse is fascinating and powerful, but it's more effective in the early, enigmatic build-up than when he finally shows his hand.

He's also a little on-the-nose at times – he probably didn't need to make the historical references obvious by actually naming the two main characters Lewis and Clark – and while the journey remains a thrilling ride, the book's finale is surprisingly low-key and gets resolved quicker than you might expect.

If you're tired of bleak and gritty survival tales, it won't make you change your mind

Ultimately, the freshness of the book's approach can't disguise the overall sense of familiarity. Aside from a couple of genuine surprises, we're in very well-travelled territory, and if you're already tired of this kind of bleak and gritty survival story, *The Dead Lands* isn't going to make you change your mind. Despite the flaws, however, there's much about the novel to recommend, and it's still a fascinating, weird and extremely well-written example of the post-apocalyptic subgenre. **Saxon Bullock**

? Percy is currently working with screenwriter Akiva Goldsman on a US TV adaptation of his werewolf novel *Red Moon*.



The Silence

Threat Sounds

★★★★☆

Release Date: 17 April
368 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author: Tim Lebbon
Publisher: Titan Books

Our genre is full of threats with one fatal flaw, whether it's the Weeping Angels' inability to move when witnessed, or the T-Rex's trouble seeing stationary targets. It should be consoling to know there's something heroes can do when faced with scary monsters. But those apparent imperfections often create increased tension, as your lead desperately tries not to blink at statues, or stay still as a dinosaur snorts his hat off.

The Silence's Big Bads are no different. Bat-like beasts called vesps who can't see anything, they hunt by sound, gruesomely decimating their prey in the hope that they'll inspire screams, so they can start the cycle all over again. It's a pretty cool high concept, but it gets better. Our main protagonist is a young deaf girl, Ally, with a close-knit family who can sign to each other – they can communicate without sound. Ally's perceived disability combines with her fierce intelligence, giving her loved ones a chance of survival as the vesps, released from a cave prison during an excavation, spread across the planet.

If *The Silence* has a flaw, it's that it's an extremely slow-paced book. But when the action does eventually kick in, that weakness is revealed as a strength – the time taken to build makes you care about carefully crafted characters, bringing almost unbearable stress to the conclusion. **Sam Ashurst**

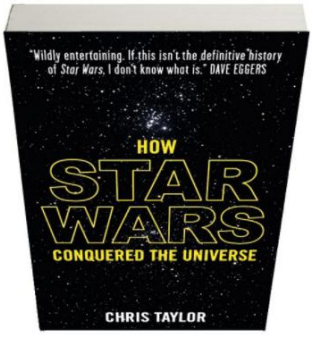
? Tim Lebbon will be signing copies of *The Silence* at Forbidden Planet's Shaftesbury Avenue shop on 18 April.

How Star Wars Conquered The Universe

This *is* the book you're looking for

★★★★☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
488 pages | Hardback/paperback
Author: Chris Taylor
Publisher: Head Of Zeus



"Another galaxy, another time." So begins the novelisation of *Star Wars*, released early to build buzz. It doesn't have the same ring as "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." but back then, no one knew how significant the little details would be to George Lucas's creation. It became a bestseller, and made its own contribution to the film's success. Now, months from a new chapter in the legend, this book has a similar potential to increase excitement, and remind people of why they love Luke and co. But does it succeed?

It's split into two parts, with one main narrative – Lucas's hero's journey to get his vision onto the screen – interrupted by mini-stories focusing on significant fans (the creator of the unit of Stormtrooper cosplayers known as the 501st; Ghyslain Raza, aka *Star Wars* Kid; and many more) or contributors to the legacy (kids working out how much a Death Star would cost, leading to a petition to the White House; the effects artist taken to court for selling his own copyrighted creations...). They're stories you probably half-know already, but it's fascinating to read about them in depth. The same goes for the making-of segments, but Chris Taylor expands these oft-repeated tales. You probably know that R2-D2 stems from Reel 2 Dialogue 2, but did you know it came from an in-joke by Lucas and editor Walter Murch? That's right, George Lucas made jokes! The stand-out setpiece is the section detailing the multiple drafts the first script went through, and Lucas's frustration as he tried to express the images in his head.

Does the book work as marketing for *The Force Awakens*? To a certain extent, yes. But its most significant impact is to peel away Lucas's reputation as an unemotional and distant figure, revealing the human underneath. **Sam Ashurst**

Chris Taylor is the deputy editor of *Mashable*, which may explain the book's partial focus on memes and viral videos.

BULLET TIME
A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS

STAR WARS: EPIC YARNS

Release Date: 14 April
24 pages each | Hardback
Authors: Jack & Holman Wang
Publisher: Lucas Books

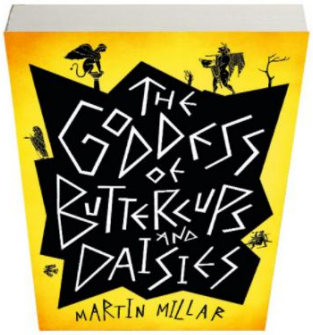
- *Epic Yarns* retells the original *Star Wars* trilogy in the most minimalist style imaginable.
- Each of the movies is boiled down to just 12 key words – like "father" for *Empire*'s big revelation, or "boom!" for the destruction of the second Death Star.
- Let's be honest, these retellings probably wouldn't make sense if you didn't know the movies.
- The stars of the books are felt figure recreations of iconic scenes – hence the title.
- Being rendered in fabric makes pretty much everything cute – the Ewoks and Yoda were a given, but you'll also want to give Boba Fett and the Emperor a cuddle!

The Goddess Of Buttercups And Daisies

Greece is the word

★★★★☆

Release Date: 2 April
192 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author: Martin Millar
Publisher: Piatkus



His prose style is sparse, he writes about losers and, thanks to his agoraphobia, he's doesn't make it to many festivals to give readings. Martin Millar, it's safe to say, has never become a mainstream literary figure. And yet there are good arguments to suggest he's one of Britain's most important writers – if only for the way his early novels, such as his 1987 debut *Milk, Sulphate And Alby Starvation*, anticipated both alt-fic by the likes of Irving Welsh and, especially with 1992's *The Good Fairies Of New York*, urban fantasy.

London is usually Millar's beat, but *Buttercups And Daisies* is set in an ancient Athens exhausted by years of war with Sparta. Here, Aristophanes rails at his latest play being underfunded (his cast's comedy phalluses just aren't big enough to get laughs), the gods and their servants capriciously intervene in human affairs, urbane Socrates occasionally dispenses words of wisdom, and poor but (mostly) optimistic Luxos the poet hopes the world will come to see his talent – and falls in love with a nymph.

If this all sounds slight, nothing could be further from the truth because, make no mistake, it's tough to write this directly, this simply, and yet still make your readers think anew about why war is rubbish and love is ace. A wonderful book. **Jonathan Wright**

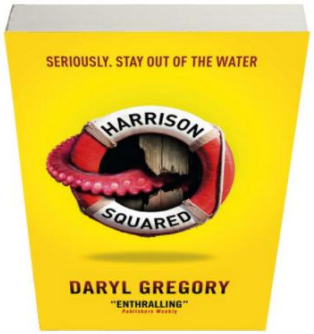
Luxos the poet bears more than a slight resemblance to Lux from *Lux The Poet*, Millar's 1988 novel set in Brixton.

Harrison Squared

Here be monsters

★★★★☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
352 pages | Paperback
Author: Daryl Gregory
Publisher: Titan Books



Sea monsters have been a source of fear and fascination for centuries, and it is these ancient tales of leviathans that invest Daryl Gregory's sixth novel with a dank sense of primal dread.

Shortly after their arrival in the fog-bound fishing port of Dunnsmouth (an unsettlingly odd place that might be twinned with Midwich), teenager Harrison Harrison's marine biologist mother goes missing in a boating accident eerily similar to the one that claimed his father – and his own leg – more than a decade earlier.

Unfortunately for our hero, who harbours a clammy terror of the sea, the answers to the mystery lie several fathoms below – Gregory cannily exploiting the sense that, while science fiction often raises its face to the stars, there's nothing quite so alien as what lies beneath our own oceans.

Clearly inspired by Coleridge's "The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner" – from which it quotes heavily – *Harrison Squared* tempers its muculent Lovecraftian weirdness with a dry wit, courtesy of its whip-smart protagonist, and occasional pop-cultural asides to remind us that, however strange this world might be, it's still the same one Taylor Swift lives in.

It's a shame so much time is devoted to the town's high school – those submissive, glassy-eyed kids feel a bit old hat – but, that aside, this is a vividly told mystery story that, like Dunnsmouth itself, reveals hidden depths. **Paul Kirkley**

Want more? You can catch up with Harrison 20 years later in Daryl Gregory's *We Are All Completely Fine*, published last year.

The Art And Making Of Penny Dreadful

Belated behind-the-scenes book

★★★½☆

Release Date: 17 April
176 pages | Hardback
Author: Sharon Gosling
Publisher: Titan Books

Tardy timing is the achilles heel of this companion to Showtime's slice of blood-spattered Victoriana. One can see the sense in holding it back a little while, to keep, say, the final-episode reveal about Josh Hartnett's character under wraps. And maybe now, with expectancy building for season two's May airdate, is a profitable time for release. But it feels odd to read actors describing their characters this long after the series debuted.

Still, Sharon Gosling's peek behind-the-scenes is intelligently written (expect phrases like "negotiating dichotomies"). It's also pleasingly informative, thanks to educational digressions about Victorian society.

The likes of showrunner John Logan and production designer Jonathan McKinstry provide some worthwhile insights. What really comes across is the attention to detail. Take a set featuring Dorian's collection of paintings: once prints were made, all 164 were painstakingly brushed with glue to lend them a brushwork texture. It's the art that proves the real draw, though. Most of this consists of designs for sets, which don't exactly set the pulses racing, but there is a handful of sexier stuff, particularly the concept art for the series' vampires. **Ian Berriman**

Touching up the most handsome fella in town.

Early vampire concept art.

To keep the truth about Ethan Chandler's alter ego under wraps, the character was referred to as "Brian".

The Vagrant

Swords and solar cells

★★★★☆

Release Date: 23 April
400 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author: Peter Newman
Publisher: Harper Voyager

This isn't an easy read. Words don't flow smoothly; staccato sentences stop/start like a juddering car. Peter Newman's novel of a demon-infested world is reminiscent of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* – dark and desolate, relentlessly bleak, with the odds stacked sky-high against the nameless wandering hero.

The protagonist in *The Vagrant* is also a man with no name. Travelling with a baby, a chatty sidekick (named Harm) and a stubborn goat, he trudges across a land horribly mutated and broken by a demonic invasion. His task? Survive. Deliver a Seraph Knight's sentient sword to the Shining City in the north.

Newman writes economically, short and sharp, spattering his post-apocalyptic world with wonderfully dark imaginings: messages carried in blood; cults of biologically augmented survivors; a young girl remade into an armoured horror, her humanity still flickering beneath metal and mechanics. It's deeply dark. Different. Even somewhat risky. The main character never speaks and so the author uses the various supporting characters (and a slow-burning backstory) to shape and define him.

Questions and open loops urge you forward. Who is the vagrant? Is the baby his? How can the travellers outrun a hellish invasion that kills, corrupts and reanimates everything it defeats? Come visit this brilliantly imaginative land of winged swords and broken solar cells. Find out for yourself. **Dean Evans**

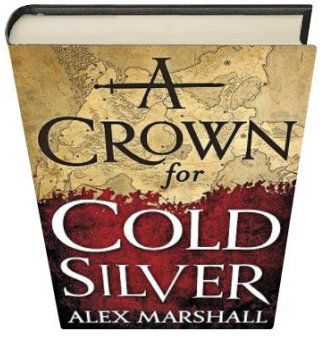
Peter Newman is married to another writer: Emma Newman, author of the *Split Worlds* series, set in a secret "mirror city" of Bath.

A Crown For Cold Silver

The lady vanishes. Then returns

★★★☆☆

Release Date: 16 April
646 pages | Hardback
Author: Alex Marshall
Publisher: Orbit



A Crown for Cold *Silver* is apparently "perfect for fans of Scott Lynch and Joe Abercrombie", but try to ignore the PR blurb; it has none of the keen wit of the former and lacks the poetic rhythm of the latter. But that's not to say that "Alex Marshall" doesn't weave a strong tale in his/her fantasy debut, with elements of humour, zippy dialogue and moments of grisly darkness.

It's certainly epic enough. Having faked her own death and retired to a quiet mountain village, legendary general Cobalt Zosia is forced back into action when her husband and friends are murdered by troops loyal to the Queen of the Crimson Empire. Like any good fantasy heroine, Zosia swears vengeance and embarks on a quest to seek out old cohorts, amass an army and bring down the Empire. The trouble is, Zosia is 20 years older and not everybody is pleased to see her.

With a narrative that flits between multiple characters, including Zosia, the roguish ex-villain Maroto and a "weirdborn" warrior nun, the story takes time to gather any momentum. It dilly-dallies with its world-building, which will annoy anyone who craves a brisker pace.

You might end up putting the book down. But even if you don't find all of the viewpoint characters compelling (and some aren't), you'll want to know what happens to at least one of them. **Dean Evans**

Apparently, "Alex Marshall is a pseudonym for an acclaimed author who has previously published several novels." But who?

Companion Piece

Not just yelps and twisted ankles

★★★☆☆

Release Date: 7 April
272 pages | Paperback/ebook
Editors: LM Myles, Liz Barr
Publisher: Mad Norwegian Press

In *Doctor Who*, the

Doctor might be the star, but it's through the companions that we relate to him. This collection of 33 essays aims to "celebrate and critique" our mad scientist's friends.

It's a neat concept, but mediocre in execution; there's nothing here that demands to be read or quoted, nothing that will change your mind or make you re-evaluate a storyline. And while individual defences of characters such as Adric or Mel are entertaining, other essays that examine specific companions repeat themselves. Yes they scream but that's because... Yes they ask questions all the time but that's because... But these traits are common to most companions – and yes they're almost always justified, "because". Individual defences often seem to really be defending the entire concept of the companion to non-fans who deride it; yes they scream, yes they ask a lot of questions, but those aren't necessarily bad things, okay?

There are a few gems: Una McCormack examines the role of the domestic in companions' lives, and Karen K Burrows takes a scholarly look at the use of text by Amy, while Phoebe Taylor has written a compelling piece on the similarities between Romana and River. In addition, there are many small but interesting points made. But this remains a collection that makes for pleasant reading without ever coming close to essential insight. **Rhian Drinkwater**

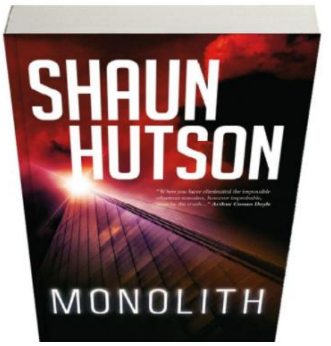
The all-female line-up of writers also includes novelists such as Mary Robinette Kowal, Seanan McGuire and Karen Miller.

Monolith

Bricks and slaughter

★★★☆☆

Release Date: 2 April
336 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author: Shaun Hutson
Publisher: Caffeine Nights



Godfather of gore

Shaun Hutson has been penning novelisations for Hammer since 2010. *Monolith* marks a welcome return to his own material.

The Crystal Tower is a new sight on London's skyline – a glittering glass and concrete edifice that should be a real estate hot ticket, but is blighted by mysterious accidents. People die in falling elevators or get skewered by rogue forklifts. Journalists Jess and Alex investigate, but are plunged into danger when they uncover a sinister secret.

Monolith resides happily within the cosy-horror subgenre. That's not a slight – this is a decent tale, well-told – but there's a familiarity to the plot and the way that Hutson's no-nonsense prose cuts to the chase.

There's also an unexpected element of political commentary. As people drop in the tower, it's hard not to think of the 400+ Nepalese construction workers who have died since Qatar won the bid to host the 2022 World Cup. As several characters remark here, the life of a foreign labourer is very cheap.

There are occasional Garth Marenghi moments where the author's voice bleeds through into the interior monologues – a scene where someone dismisses "insipid" R&B in favour of Hutson's pals Iron Maiden is particularly amusing. And his dialogue-heavy prose isn't as artful as, say, Adam Nevill or Christopher Fowlers's. But as gory easy-reads go, *Monolith* is very enjoyable. **Will Salmon**

The book also has a bonus short story: "Jingle Bells", a Christmas tale with a predictable – but amusing – punchline.

WHSmith

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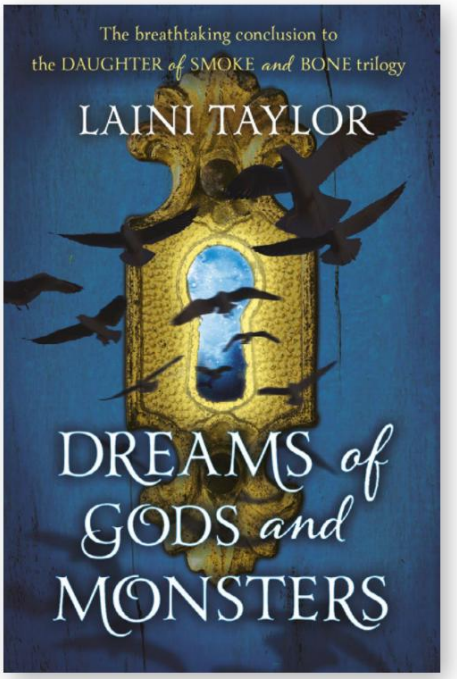

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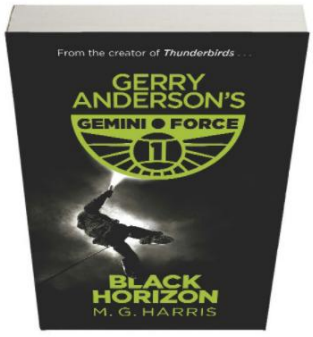


Gemini Force: Black Horizon

Gerry built

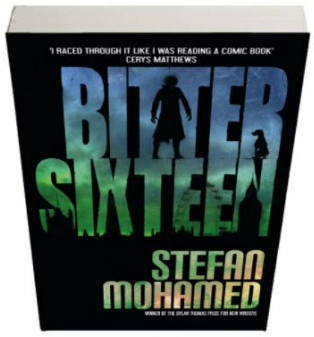
★★★½☆

Release Date: 2 April
288 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author: MG Harris
Publisher: Orion

FOR YEARS BEFORE HIS death, Gerry Anderson had been toying with a project that explored how an operation like International Rescue might have been created. Author MG Harris took up the baton, and after a successful Kickstarter campaign, limited edition and subsequent interest from Orion, *Gemini Force* is now getting a wider release.

Introduced through a wannabe recruit, *Gemini Force* is basically *Thunderbirds* with rescue craft named after the zodiac – and pure Anderson stuff. It's action-packed fluff populated by broad-brushstroke characters, written like James Paterson on speed (one rescue covers four chapters but barely 20 pages). It'd also make a great TV series. Which is probably the point... **Dave Golder**

Easter Eggs in the book include the use of the phrase "Stand by for action" from *Stingray*'s opening title sequence.



Bitter Sixteen

Biff! Bang! Powys!

★★★★☆

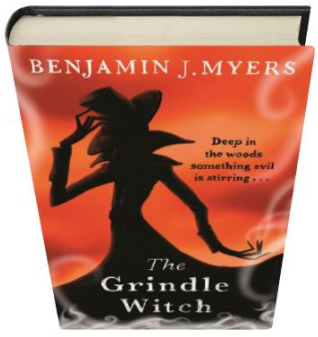
Release Date: OUT NOW!
352 pages | Paperback
Author: Stefan Mohamed
Publisher: Salt Publishing

THIS SPARKY DEBUT PUTS the classic comic book origin story through the pop-cultural blender by gifting superpowers to a kid who just happens to be a massive sci-fi geek.

For Smallville, substitute Tref-y-Celwyn, the mid-Welsh town where vowel-deficient teenage loner Stanly suddenly discovers a talent for flight and telekinesis. Accompanied by a potty-mouthed beagle (just go with it), Stanly up, ups and aways to London, where he throws his lot in with a bunch of Generation X-Men investigating a series of sinister child abductions.

Zippy prose keeps the story barrelling along, the genre references come thick and fast (even the dog a Yoda impression does) and, in Stanly, Mohamed has created a hero you'll really root for. A flying start. **Paul Kirkley**

Bitter Sixteen has already won Stefan Mohamed the Dylan Thomas Prize for New Writers. There's lovely.



The Grindle Witch

How To Train Your Demon

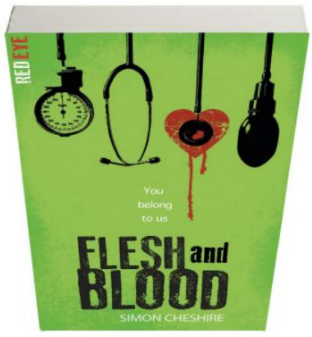
★★★☆☆

Release Date: 2 April
272 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author: Benjamin J Myers
Publisher: Orion Children's Books

WHEN THE JOLLY FAMILY moves from the big city to an idyllic country village, teenage Jack is expecting his summer to be pretty boring. But Grindle has a dark history, and Jack's crush on a local girl leads him into all kinds of supernatural trouble.

Several mythological nasties turn up; there's a magic blacksmith, and a creepy demon hunter. Still, the supernatural stuff is often easier to swallow than the daft decisions the teenagers make. Benjamin Myers uses some bizarre metaphors and turns of phrase. When it works, the style enhances the eerie atmosphere; when it doesn't, it just seems clunky and archaic. But the story is well-paced and compelling, with a few unexpected twists. Like Grindle itself, *The Grindle Witch* has its quirks, but it's definitely not boring. **Sarah Dobbs**

If anyone should know about fighting baddies, it's author Benjamin J Myers – a qualified battlefield survival instructor.



Flesh And Blood

Don't lose your head

★★★½☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
352 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author: Simon Cheshire
Publisher: Stripes Publishing

YOUNG ADULT CAN BE A broad term, covering everything from slightly edgy children's novels to older books barely distinguishable from adult fiction. This latest entry in the Red Eye series of YA horror definitely leans to the more mature end, with some gory body horror and a bleak, uncompromising climax.

Sam Hunter is a teenage boy in a poor family made good, moving from run-down estates to the exclusive Priory Mews. But a posh address isn't everything it's made out to be, and his new neighbours are definitely up to something sinister. It's just a shame investigating them will turn out to be a terrible mistake...

Despite minor niggles and some unsubtle social commentary, this is a compelling story that isn't afraid to ratchet up the suspense and rip up the bodies. **Rhian Drinkwater**

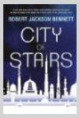
Cheshire says that while writing *Flesh And Blood*, at times he felt such self-disgust that he had to leave his desk.

REISSUES

CITY OF STAIRS

★★★★☆

Release Date: 2 April
Author: Robert Jackson Bennett
Publisher: Jo Fletcher Books



This swords-and-sorcery novel is set a couple of generations after an enslaved people overthrew their masters' gods. Unfortunately that caused a destabilisation of reality in which landscapes have been rewritten; the titular city is full of half-buildings and staircases that lead nowhere. We said: "The book's mechanics don't always keep pace with its imagination but this is an absorbing and mature work."

THE LONG MARS

★★★★☆

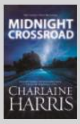
Release Date: 9 April
Authors: Stephen Baxter, Terry Pratchett
Publisher: Corgi

The third in the *Long Earth* series continues to explore the ramifications of humanity's newfound ability to "step" into alternate Earths – and now, alternate versions of Mars, which adds all manner of bizarre lifeforms, biospheres and technologies. We said: "*The Long Mars* can feel more Baxter than Pratchett at times; the gags are thinner on the ground than previously. But it's a thrilling and ceaselessly entertaining ride."

MIDNIGHT CROSSROAD

★★★½☆

Release Date: 9 April
Author: Charlaine Harris
Publisher: Gollancz



In Charlaine Harris's first novel since the Sookie Stackhouse books, young internet psychic Manfred Bernardo moves into a tiny hamlet where her new neighbours include a lovelorn witch and a vampire. We said: "It's enjoyable to see how the different inhabitants of Midnight get along... The characters have a peculiar charm, although frequently they echo characters in other Harris stories rather too closely."

THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST

Release Date: OUT NOW!
Author: Ursula K Le Guin
Publisher: Gollancz

Though inspired by the Vietnam War, the ecological themes of Ursula Le Guin's 1976 novel mean it still feels topical. In the far-future, humanity has conquered a forest world, setting up a logging colony and using the indigenous species – three-foot high, green-furred creatures – as forced labour. Eventually this pacifist race rises up against its oppressors. The slender book is fairly simplistic, but it's still compelling and thought-provoking.

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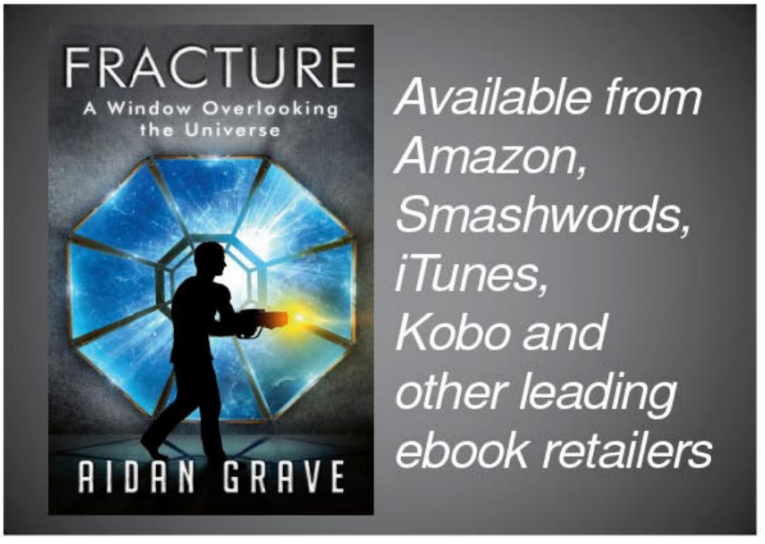

FIRST READ

AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK

The Silence

by Tim Lebbon

Scientists exploring a cave system have released a horde of blind, carnivorous creatures that hunt by sound.

THE AUTHOR

Tim Lebbon is the critically acclaimed author of many horror and dark fantasy novels, including *Coldbrook* and *Dusk*, and the *New York Times* bestselling movie novelizations of *30 Days of Night* and *The Cabin in the Woods*. Tim has won three British Fantasy Awards, a Bram Stoker Award, a Shocker, a Tombstone and been a finalist for the International Horror Guild and World Fantasy Awards. Fox 2000 acquired film rights to his *The Secret Journeys of Jack London* series, and his *Toxic City* trilogy is in development with ABC Studios. He lives in Monmouthshire with his wife and two children.

Deaf teenager Ally and her family are fleeing to the country, hoping that isolation from other humans – and the noise they make – will save them...

"Vesps," I whispered. "Mum, Dad... vesps!" I pointed across the hillside in the direction of the distant, traffic-clogged road. Smoke still rose from several burning vehicles, and the military roadblock remained in place. I squinted, wondering if I was wrong and had simply imagined the worst when I saw a cloud of specks in the sky. But then I saw movement on the ground, starting at the top of the slope where the road appeared over the hillside.

People were running. They flowed downhill past parked vehicles and the hedges lining the road. Maybe they're screaming, I thought, hoping against hope that they were not.

In the air above and around them the pale shapes flew. They flitted and swirled, spiralling above the road, dropping and rising again. People tripped and were immediately smothered in vesps. Some fled into the fields, leaving their cars and loved ones behind. The creatures darted after them, swerving back and forth before closing in and landing on their targets.

The flicker of gunfire—muzzle flashes, coughing smoke—erupted from among the military vehicles, and a cloud of creatures quickly converged on the roadblock.

I'm seeing people die, I thought.

I sensed movement beside me and instinctively ducked, glancing that way with a hand held up to ward off danger. Dad was reaching for me. He held my hand and pulled me gently towards the Jeep.

Mum, Jude and Lynne were already inside. As Dad climbed in behind them, I checked for Otis.

He was standing halfway between the Jeep and the rolled Land Rover, staring uphill past the Jeep with his hackles bristling, teeth bared.

"Otis!" I whispered, and the dog leaped past me into the Jeep.

Then we turned as one and looked back at the Land Rover.

It was difficult to see Glenn from this angle. I could just see his head and arm, the stark, dark shape of the shotgun lying beside him, and the puddle of blood beneath him on the upturned ceiling. He was motionless. I hoped because he knew what was happening.

Still looking outside, I reached over and grabbed someone's hand. I wasn't sure whose it was. Mum and Dad were in the front seats; me, Jude and Lynne were in the back, and Otis had jumped over into the boot, already used to travelling there.

The vesps came. There were not as many as I had expected. Several flew by on the left a couple of metres above the ground, circling the Jeep and Land Rover and then moving on.

They must have echolocation, like bats, I thought, and it had never occurred to me before. If they were blind and hunted by sound, they must also have a means to navigate, feel where they were going.

And they were horrible. The size of large kittens, leathery wings perhaps twice as long as their bodies, skins or hides a pale, sickly, slick yellow, flowing tails like several split tentacles, the nubs of legs on their lower bodies, and teeth. I saw the teeth even as they flew by, because they were bared. Small but glinting, their lips were drawn back like folds of skin, mouths exposed and ready to attack, eat. And what was worst about them was their unnaturalness. They simply were not meant to be. They were like a child's drawing of a monster given life, all whimsy stripped away, only horror and ugliness left behind. They reminded me of deep-sea fish, blind and ugly. I had always appreciated nature for what it really was. But these things...

They had shattered the natural balance. A mutation. A plague.

A vesp whispered along the side of the Jeep, larger than the

others. Perhaps the first few I'd seen had been infants, but this was clearly an adult. Its trailing wing left a moist smear across the windows, and Otis bared his teeth.

I touched his head and whispered, very softly, "Otis, no." I could feel the rumble of a growl beneath my hand, and I glanced around at the others.

They stared, wide-eyed and terrified. Jude was crying. Mum held the shotgun pointing upwards.

Dad was looking past me at the dog, and when he caught my eye he mouthed, "Keep him quiet!"

I reached over into the boot and gently, slowly, hugged Otis to me. He resisted at first, then leaned into my embrace. I felt the growl rumbling deep within him, but his teeth were no longer bared.

Something hit the Jeep. I felt the impact and glanced up in time to see the slick smears on the back window. Three or four more vesps landed there, those strange tentacles on their abdomens squirming for purchase against the glass. Then they fell and flew away.

It was like the beginning of a snowstorm. Across the hillside the vesps drifted down from uphill, gliding back and forth, dodging rocky outcroppings and trees. I saw some catching birds in flight, suddenly mimicking the singing birds' flight patterns before plucking them from the air.

One of them drifted close and gently struck the window close to Otis's nose.

The dog started barking. "Otis, no, Otis, no!" I whispered, but it was too late, and it was as if Otis had become senseless to everything but the vesps. He nudged forward between barks, butting the glass and the creature that clung to the other side. Its wings flapped rapidly, tentacles slicking down the window before finding some purchase below. Then its body seemed to tighten and flex as muscles held it taut, and the animal's teeth scratched at the glass, scoring it deeply. Other vesps came.

Dad grabbed my shoulder and pulled me around. "Make him stop!" he said, and I saw how scared everyone was. Jude had crawled into Mum's front seat, and Lynne sat back with her hands to her mouth. Behind her, three vesps struck her window and started scraping.

I pulled Otis towards me and leaned into the back seat, pressing my mouth to his ear and saying, "Otis, no!" I injected as much command as I could into my voice.

The dog pulled away and jumped at the rear window where several vesps were now attached. I could just see past the creatures assaulting the Jeep, and across the hillside others were streaking towards us. They must release a signal, like bees, I thought.

"Otis, please!" I said. But the dog was both excited and terrified. His hackles were raised, his eyes dilated, and he leaped at the windows where vesps were attached. They scraped and scored with their ugly teeth, and in several places the glass was obscured by deep scratches. I could not imagine anything chewing their way into a car. It was impossible, wasn't it?

It depended on how long they stayed. And how long they would remember the noise, when and if I eventually made Otis stop.

Something happened. I felt the tension in the Jeep shift. Everyone turned their heads as one to look downhill at the Land Rover, and several vesps dropped from the windows and darted that way. The glass was smeared with their secretions and clouded where they'd been scratching with their teeth, but it was clear that the Land Rover had now become a newer, more attractive target.

"What happened?" I whispered. There were only a few vesps left on the Jeep now, and Otis stood panting, no longer barking.

"Glenn," Lynne mouthed to me, and then I knew.

"Oh, no," I whispered. Mum and Dad were pressed to the windscreen. Past them, I could see vesps converging on the Land Rover from all directions. Many of them landed on the upturned chassis and crawled across it, their movements awkward. It seemed they only had grace in the air. Others dropped to the ground close by and hobbled forwards, while some flew straight into the vehicle's interior through the smashed windows.

The shattered driver's window faced uphill, and in moments it was a squirming, pale yellow mass of vesps.

A mess of bloodied parts and smoke blasted outward, smoking flesh pattering across the grass. But the gap made in the crowd of vesps soon filled again.

"What did he do?" I whispered.

"Shotgun," Mum signed. "Now he's shouting."

"Still?" But no one answered that. Lynne attempted to reach forward and cover Jude's eyes, but he shook her off and she did not try again.

To find out what happens next, pick up The Silence, out now from Titan Books (RRP £7.99). Ebook also available. www.titanbooks.com

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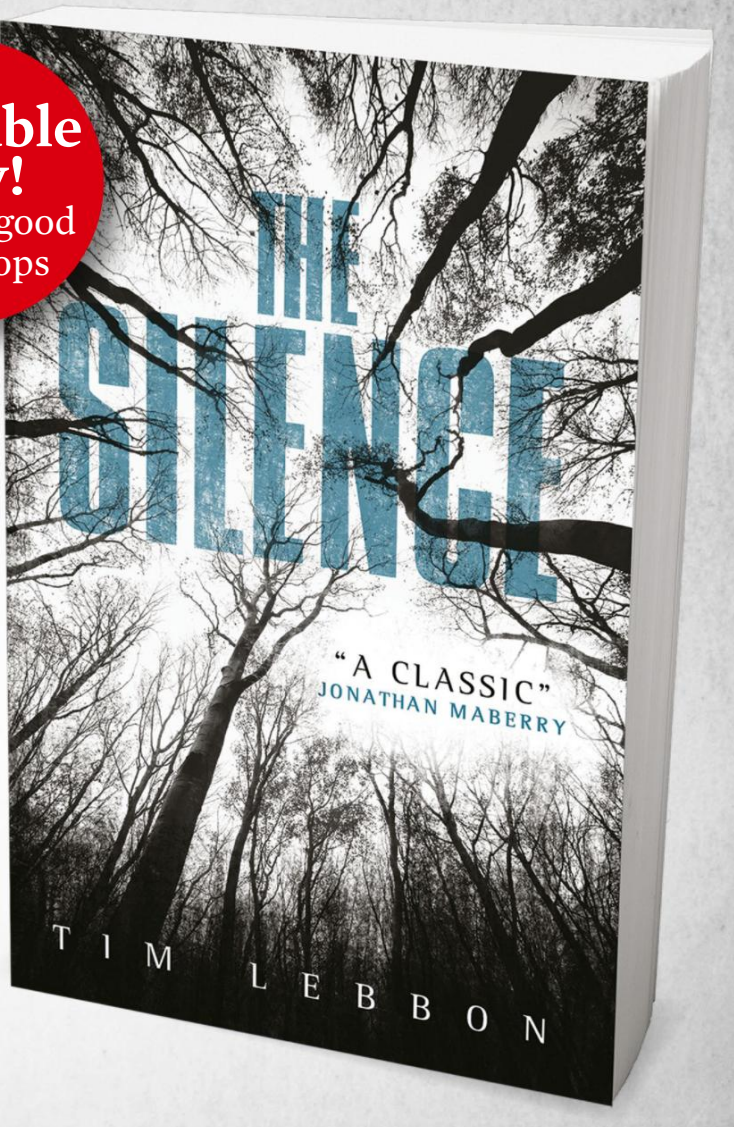


BOOK CLUB 113

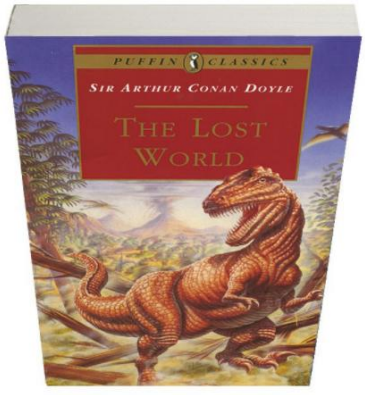
The Lost World

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 1912

Adam Christopher remembers one of the most important sci-fi yarns of the early 20th century

AS ONE OF THE greatest contributors to modern popular literature, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous creation is, of course, the world's greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes. But Conan Doyle wrote more than just detective fiction, and while he (and several contemporary critics) regarded the seven purely historical novels written between 1888 and 1906 as his best work, there was just one character, after Holmes himself, that would live on in popular culture. This remarkable figure was a loud, aggressive, brash professor, a "caveman in a lounge suit", the one and only Professor George Edward Challenger, the star of a series of short novels and stories that mix science fiction and science fantasy with a healthy dose of pulp action and Boy's Own adventure. And it is the first of these — *The Lost World* — that has gone down in SF history as a classic of its kind.

Originally serialised in *The Strand Magazine* from April to November 1912, *The Lost World* is about as high-concept as you can get: on a remote mountain plateau in the heart of the Amazon, dinosaurs and other prehistoric beasts have miraculously survived the aeons. That's all the reader needs to know. The tale is narrated by a reporter, Edward Malone, who is assigned to cover Professor Challenger's return expedition to the Amazonian jungle after a public meeting turns to tumult when the Professor attempts to show evidence he has gathered of the plateau's impossible inhabitants. To settle the matter, an expedition is assembled; adventure and derring-do ensues. The plateau is real, as are the creatures that live on it. What is also real is the life-threatening situation the expedition finds itself in — betrayed by their native bearers and trapped on the plateau, Challenger and co must not only face flesh-eating dinosaurs and pterodactyls, but a tribe of vicious ape-men with an alarming penchant for throwing people off cliffs.



Well deserving of its place as a science fiction classic

Although published in the late Edwardian era, *The Lost World* feels like a throwback to an earlier age of Victorian high adventure. Livingstone and Stanley — no doubt still great heroes looming large in the national psyche — are both namechecked, despite their famous meeting on the shores of Lake Tanganyika having taken place 40 years previously. The perilous journey of Challenger's expedition through the Amazon just to reach the plateau itself is arguably the most thrilling part of the story, told with beautifully descriptive touches by our intrepid reporter, Malone.

The most surprising thing is the lost world itself — there are dinosaurs and other impossible survivors of prehistoric epochs, but like the man-eating plants in John Wyndham's classic *The Day Of The Triffids*, the monsters are almost peripheral to the story. Instead, the focus quickly turns to the expedition's quest for escape, their capture by the ape-men, and subsequent rescue by some native Indians, with whom they form an alliance in order to defeat the enemy.

Thrilling adventure, certainly, but the archaic nature of the story – and the author himself – rears its ugly head with some frequency. Conan Doyle's attitudes towards race and cultures other than the "superior" European, while absolutely of the period, are enough to take the shine off the book for the modern reader.

Despite this, *The Lost World* is still well deserving of its place as a science fiction classic. It wasn't the first story to feature dinosaurs in the modern world – prehistoric monsters feature in Jules Verne's *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*, first published in 1864 – but the influence of *The Lost World* would be felt for decades to come, serving as the inspiration for everything from the 1969 cowboys-vs-dinosaurs film *The Valley Of Gwangi* to a modern classic, Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*.

Professor Challenger and his friends would feature in four more stories, the last of which, *The Disintegration Machine*, was published a little more than a year before Conan Doyle's death in 1930. While *The Lost World* is the most famous and well-remembered, taken together, the Challenger canon represents a collection of early British sci-fi worthy to stand alongside that of Conan Doyle's contemporary, HG Wells.

Adam's latest novel, Elementary: The Ghost Line, is out now from Titan Books.

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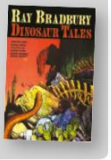
Jurassic Park/The Lost World (Michael Crichton)
Adapted by Steven Spielberg into a film that would kick off an entire franchise, *Jurassic Park* and its sequel are perhaps Michael Crichton's greatest legacy.

Dinosaur Tales (Ray Bradbury)
The science fiction grandmaster's love of giant prehistoric reptiles is showcased in this 1983 collection of shorts, which includes his famous 1952 story "A Sound Of Thunder".



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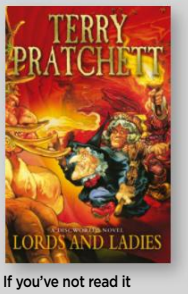
NEXT ISSUE

In honour of the late, great Sir Terry Pratchett, *The Copper Promise* author Jen Williams travels to Discworld with *Lords And Ladies*.



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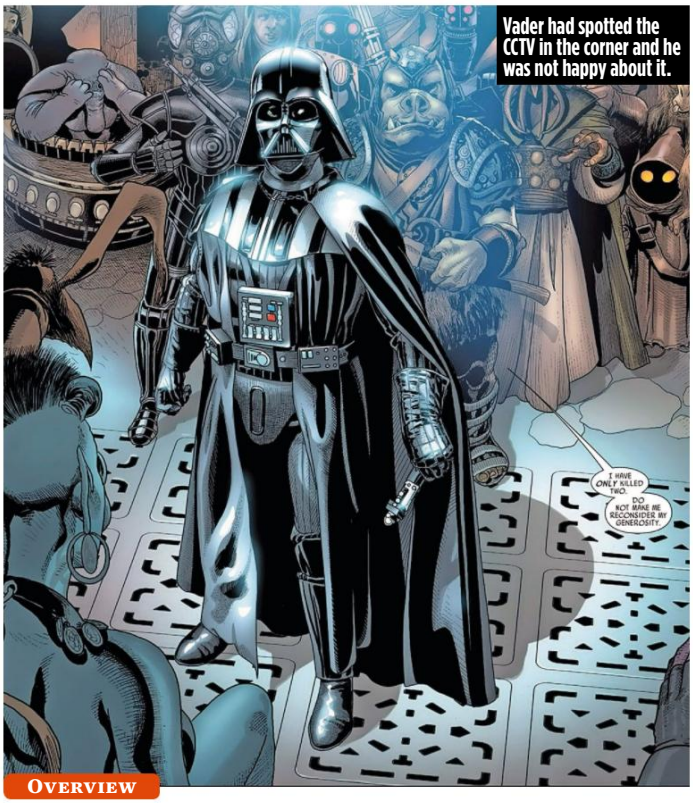


Overview

Star Wars

Marvel Strikes Back

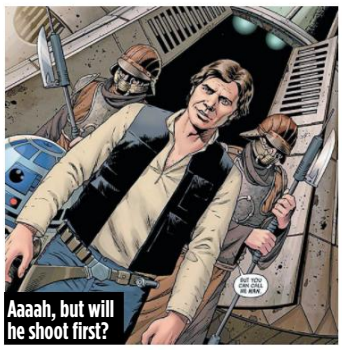
Release Date: OUT NOW!
Publisher: Marvel Comics
Writers: Jason Aaron, Kieron Gillen, Mark Waid
Artists: John Cassaday, Salvador Larroca, Terry & Rachel Dodson

The Force

Awakens is now only months from release, so it's time for the next phase of Project Remind Everyone What They Liked About *Star Wars*: the relaunch of the franchise's comics line, following the end of Dark Horse's lengthy stewardship. There's a pleasing "circle of life" aspect to *Star Wars*' return to Marvel, the publishers of the very first ongoing *Star Wars* comic back in 1977, and this new era is already off to an attention-grabbing start.

The flagship title *Star Wars* (★★★★☆) is basically doing what Dark Horse's similar 2013–14 series did before continuity was reset, and goes back to the aftermath of *A New Hope* to tell fresh stories with the classic cast. As an attempted raid on an Imperial outpost turns dangerous, Jason Aaron's script goes for a bright and thrilling action-adventure tone that perfectly captures the mood of *Episode IV*. There's occasional creaky dialogue and over-enthusiastic continuity references, but otherwise these first three issues are great entertainment backed up by typically stylish visuals from artist John Cassaday.

For those who prefer their *Star Wars* tales with heavy doses of intrigue, there's *Darth Vader* (★★★★½), which follows the titular Dark Lord of the Sith as he tries to strengthen his precarious position with the Emperor following his failure to prevent the destruction of the Death Star. Writer Kieron Gillen is an ideal choice for this kind of pulp SF thriller and brings the correct mix of majesty and menace to Vader, while also building up a strong supporting cast in a series that's obviously going to be exploring the more dangerous edges of the *Star Wars* universe. The first two issues are both satisfying and packed full of plot twists, while Salvador Larroca's artwork gives the story a sharp visual style, bringing impact to the action scenes – although he does lean heavily on familiar photo-references, especially in the opening confrontation in Jabba's Palace.



A healthy balance of emotional drama and action

Alongside these two ongoing series, we also have *Princess Leia* (★★★★★), a six-issue miniseries that takes Leia on a character-centric journey as she tries to come to terms with the loss of her world by protecting the few remaining survivors of Alderaan. At the time of writing we'd only seen the first issue, but veteran comics writer Mark Waid is already giving Leia plenty of depth and maintaining a healthy balance of emotional drama and action, while the gorgeous art from Terry and Rachel Dodson makes this the most visually impressive of all the titles.

Overall, this is a trio of strong debuts which have so far delivered the kind of well-crafted storytelling everybody hoped would result from Marvel's reacquisition of the franchise. Right now, the comic-book future of *Star Wars* is looking downright healthy.

Saxon Bullock

? Beginning in April: the miniseries *Star Wars: Kanan*, which explores the background of the *Star Wars: Rebels* character.

Overview

ODY-C

Greek miss-ology

★★★★☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
Publisher: Image Comics
Writer: Matt Fraction
Artists: Christian Ward, Dee Cunniffe

After turning

Norse legends into superhero space opera in his recent run on *Thor*, Matt Fraction has now given Greek mythology the cosmic treatment. Based on Homer's *The Odyssey*, *ODY-C* gender-swaps most of the key roles: Odysseus becomes Odyssia, while the All-Mother Zeus rules over Olympus. Indeed, men are conspicuous by their absence with the introduction of a new, ambiguous sex, the Sebex.

Told largely in retrospect through an omniscient narration, there's a remote quality to the gods that adds to their mystery, although the over-reliance on exposition does hinder the pace. With Fraction referring to Robert Fagles's 1996 translation of *The Odyssey*, a passing knowledge of the text would come in handy when it comes to some of the finer details. But even if you know next to nothing about Greek legends, there's still much to enjoy in his psychedelic take on these timeless tales, which nods to both Grant Morrison and Michael Moorcock.

Or you could just marvel at Christian Ward's stunning artwork, which channels Jack Kirby and Frank Quitely by way of Moebius and Druillet. Assisted by Dee Cunniffe, he possesses one of the most evocative palettes in the business, while his experimental layouts rival those of JH Williams. Fraction's story might need its own Cliffs Notes but *ODY-C* is one of the best looking comics out there right now. **Stephen Jewell**

? Fraction made *ODY-C*'s main characters women because he wanted to write a classic superhero for his daughter.

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OVERVIEW

SHIELD

Crossovers galore

★★★☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
Publisher: Marvel Comics
Writer: Mark Waid
Artists: Carlos Pacheco, Humberto Ramos, Alan Davis

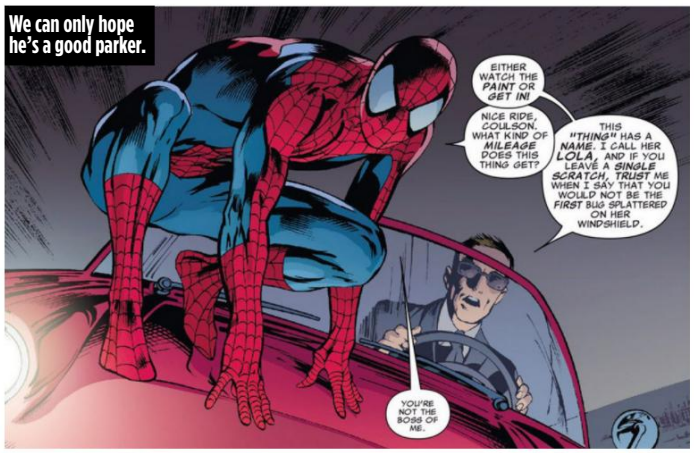
Q: When is a spin-off comic not a spin-off comic? A: When it's part of Marvel's ongoing quest to copy aspects of their Cinematic Universe in their comics, without going so far as actually *publishing* a spin-off title. The latest example is *SHIELD*, a new ongoing series starring the Marvel Comics universe version of Phil Coulson, which also brings fellow *Agents Of SHIELD* characters Melinda May, Fitz and Simmons into the fold.

Presented as a collection of largely standalone adventures (with an overall linking story arc), the basic set-up is "What if *Agents Of SHIELD* had an unlimited budget?", although the first three issues sometimes play more like blockbuster versions of the less engaging episodes that cluttered the show's first season.

The problems to be faced include rogue Asgardians, haywire supervillain weaponry and a raid on Doctor Strange's home, while there are high-profile appearances from heroes like Spider-Man and the new Ms Marvel. At its best, this is frothy superhero spectacle with eye-catching and energetic art, but it's inconsistent in style and execution.

The series' emphasis on over-the-top action means there's little room for the characters to make an impression, while the different artists working on the title don't always seem to agree on what Coulson actually looks like. But despite the flaws there's still a lot of potential here, and if *SHIELD* can deliver more adventures like issue two's engaging team-up with Ms Marvel, this series could become an ideal and accessible jumping-on point for superhero movie fans. **Saxon Bullock**

Mark Waid's online series *Insufferable* is loosely inspired by the falling out between Grant Morrison and Mark Millar.



OVERVIEW

Bitch Planet

Breaking chains

★★★★☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
Publisher: Image
Writer: Kelly Sue DeConnick
Artist: Valentine De Landro

Women-in- prison movies have a long tradition in exploitation cinema. Typically excuses to string together shower scenes and S&M bullying, movies in the subgenre like *Chained Heat* and *Wicked Warden* couldn't be accused of being progressive. Inspired by a revisit creator Kelly Sue DeConnick made to the ladies-in-cages gems she grew up on, only to discover they weren't as feminist as she remembered, *Bitch Planet* does things differently.

Women-in-prison movies generally take place in the present, or the past, on planet Earth. *Bitch Planet* is set in a futuristic nightmare. The first two issues follow a group of new inductees sent to Auxiliary Compliance Outpost Intake Facility Two, an off-world prison that treats its inmates as entertainment. Then in every third issue, DeConnick focuses on one prisoner, exploring their backstory in depth with a guest artist.

It's essentially *Orange Is The New Black* meets *Fortress*. The women are an eclectic group, both when it comes to personality, and, significantly, body types. Like its inspirations, *Bitch Planet* is packed with nudity. Unlike those films, the women's bodies are varied, and real. Valentine De Landro's art is beautiful, with a cartoon-realist edge Sean Phillips would be proud of.

Like all the best science fiction, *Bitch Planet* works as allegory – subverting sexist tropes to celebrate feminist ideology. It's also super-fun, cool, and violent. Now all it needs is a movie adaptation, and the circle will be complete. **Sam Ashurst**

One idea DeConnick left out was translation devices that convert prisoners' speech to "Compliant English", full of apologies.

GRAPHIC NOVEL

The Thrilling Adventures Of Lovelace And Babbage

The Difference Engineers

★★★☆☆

Release Date: 21 April
Publisher: Particular Books
Writer/Artist: Sydney Padua

The "difference engine" – that fascinating almost-computer developed by Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace – could have changed the course of history. It didn't for a depressingly prosaic reason: the funding was withdrawn. But what if things had gone differently? This book (collected from the webcomic of the same name) imagines a pocket universe where the dynamic duo continued with their project and had all manner of daft adventures.

With its tapestry of fact, fiction and steampunk trappings, it feels like a cousin of *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and Bryan Talbot's *Alice In Sunderland*. It's impressively well-researched – something you can't fail to notice, thanks to the endless footnotes. And therein lies a problem...

It rapidly becomes clear that Sydney Padua is less interested in telling a story than she is in sharing cool facts. The footnotes are fascinating and funny, but there are so many of them they distract from the narrative. The result feels less like a graphic novel and more of an illustrated paper on Babbage and co.

It's a shame, as Padua's art is appealing. She has an exuberant, cartoony style that's a perfect fit for the comedic tone. It's an ambitious and original work for sure, just not a particularly cohesive one. Interesting? Yes. Thrilling? Not so much. **Will Salmon**

In 1862, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* printed a gag about Babbage's machine breaking, inventing IT humour.

The Order: 1886

Beast Enders

★★½☆☆

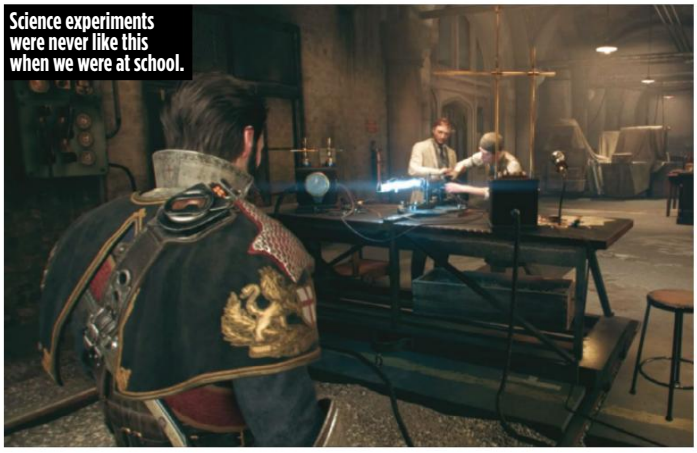
Release Date: OUT NOW!
Platform: PS4
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment

There have been fewer examples of the classic disparity between graphics and gameplay in recent years. The prettiest games have also tended to deliver the goods mechanically, with such consistency it's created a Pavlovian reflex towards visual fidelity as an indicator of overall excellence. In the case of *The Order: 1886*, it's a misleading reflex indeed.

Tell people about all the game's pacing issues, its choking linearity and bizarre design calls, and still they all want to play it.

The Order is beautiful on every level – not just its extraordinary lighting, material rendering and post-processing, but in the alt-history world it depicts. The industrial age is accelerated by electricity, and humans are split by genetic mutations which render some as bestial "half-breeds". The twin prongs of developer Ready At Dawn's thoughtful and tangible parallel dimension and the scarcely believable fidelity of its RAD 4.0 engine don't disappoint. Everything else does.

The intention here is apparently to blend action/adventure gameplay with something more cinematic. As such, the lines between cutscenes and gameplay are consistently blurred – the former all occur in-engine so there's no visual disconnect between the two. It also means your level of interaction in a given scene is often reduced to walking from point to point, perhaps examining an object before triggering either a gunfight or a cutscene. Occasionally you're given more freedom – maybe you'll pick locks, execute melee takedowns or manipulate the scenery – but these moments account for a notable minority of the overall experience.


Science experiments were never like this when we were at school.

Certainly worth your eyes, if not your money

Okay, fine. So it's a movie. So is everything Telltale has released for the last two years. But where Telltale adventure games offer dialogue choice, decisions with consequences and characters you care about, *The Order* doesn't. It isn't fully committed to either interactive drama or action/adventure, so ends up unable to meet your expectations of either. It's reasonably successful as a cover-shooter, but there are huge compromises evident here, too.

The Order's certainly worth your eyes, if not your money. Just don't expect anything deeper than a nine-hour wonder-tech showcase. Visually it's everything you could have hoped for, but the compromises required to reach that fidelity are hugely damaging. **Phil Iwaniuk**

? Released a week after *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, this also features modern-day knights using Arthurian names.

Resident Evil Revelations 2

Clicker bait

★★★½☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
Format reviewed: PS4
Also available on: PS3, PS Vita, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC
Publisher: Capcom

Revelations 2 wants to be *The Last Of Us*. In terms of pacing, its buddy character setup and other mechanics, Capcom has crafted a four-episode horror/action hybrid with a smouldering crush on Naughty Dog's doomsday classic. Hey, if you're going to aim big, shoot for the stars... or, in this case, at least try to kneecap the Moon.

Whether intentionally or not, Capcom has stumbled upon an intoxicating formula (literally, there are nefarious viruses wherever you look) in this fairly focused compromise of old- and new-school horror. Try to think of *Revelations* as a sort of Frankenstein's monster of horror video games. There are bits of *Resi 6*, the PS1 games and the aforementioned *The Last Of Us* here, all peeking out at us from between the botched stitches and head bolts. Taking a cue from Leon, Chris and Jake Muller's bloated undead three-way, you'll find guns and ammo aplenty, an athletic evade manoeuvre and loads of "kind of a zombie, but not really a zombie" critters to down.

So what's stopping this from scoring higher? Plain stupid design decisions. Firstly, bosses are uniformly awful. There's a certain bastard who's so wearing to fight, you'll drop the difficulty to Casual after 30 minutes of feebly trying to burn his mutated rump. *Rev 2* is also blighted by some harsh checkpoints:

We keep firing, they keep coming.

prepare to be plonked back five-plus minutes with sod all health too often.

But it's a lean horror hybrid that gels different eras of *Resi* into an enjoyable undead upstart. Lingering problems from the old PS3 games remain, yet this is a return to form for the legendary spookster. Yes, the action is still a tad schlocky, the script crude and the bosses pap. But *Revelations 2*'s horror highs expunge the rotting DNA brought over from *Resi 6*. **Dave Meikleham**

? Don't buy the retail box, unless you like paying £9 extra for a box and nothing else. We'd go for the £20 season pass.

AUDIO ADVENTURES

Doctor Who

Entropy, double Masters and tunnels of doom

The Entropy Plague

★★★★☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
100 minutes | £14.99 (CD)/£12.99 (download)
Publisher: Big Finish

Dark Eyes 4

★★★½☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
215 minutes | £40 (CD)/£35 (download)
Publisher: Big Finish

Requiem For The Rocket Men

★★★★½

Release Date: OUT NOW!
70 minutes | £10.99 (CD)/£8.99 (download)
Publisher: Big Finish

Short Trips: Time Tunnel

★★★½☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
30 minutes | £2.99 (download only)
Publisher: Big Finish

BIG FINISH IS OFTEN GREAT at bringing modern characterisation and depth to *Doctor Who* characters who rarely got the chance to shine on-screen, and its latest release is another example of how strong '80s companion Nyssa (Sarah Sutton) could have been, treated right.

Also the finale to their E-Space trilogy of releases, *The Entropy Plague* sees the Fifth Doctor, Nyssa, Tegan and Turlough struggling to escape from a dying "exo-universe". The addition of some clichéd space pirates is a shame, but otherwise this is a dark, powerful and very well-played adventure that packs a weighty emotional punch.

Another finale arrives in *Dark Eyes 4*, the latest four-disc box set starring Paul McGann's Eighth Doctor, which conclusively wraps up the *Dark Eyes* saga. As the Doctor tries to locate his missing companion Molly O'Sullivan, he instead encounters the nefarious schemes of the Dalek Time Controller, and has another showdown with the new incarnation of the Master (Alex MacQueen). These four episodes are inventive and enjoyable, although diminishing returns do start setting in during the latter half, as the number of plot twists, epic battles and timeline alterations gets positively bewildering.

Over in the Tom Baker-starring Fourth Doctor adventures, another incarnation of the Time Lord's nemesis is on the prowl in the pulptastic *Requiem For The Rocket Men*. Originally seen in the *Companion Chronicles* range, the Rocket Men are intergalactic criminals with a grudge against the Doctor, but when he decides to take them on directly, the result is a fun collection of deceptions and double-crosses that also involves the Master (Geoffrey Beevers). Reversing the traditional format of the Doctor/Master conflict, this is a ferociously enjoyable adventure that gives more welcome depth to the relationship between the Fourth Doctor and Leela (Louise Jameson).

Finally, the latest download-only *Short Trips* release is a tale of the Third Doctor narrated by original Pertwee companion Katy Manning. *Time Tunnel* follows the Doctor and Jo as UNIT is drafted in to investigate a mysterious train full of dead bodies. It's a nicely played and occasionally creepy tale that captures the vibe of the Pertwee era. While the climax could have done with being a little stronger, this is still a satisfying and entertaining bite-sized listen. **Saxon Bullock**.

? Out on 16 April, from BBC Audio: readings of Mark Gatiss book *The Roundheads* and the novelisation of "Frontios".

Paul Neafcy stars as the monster vlogger.

YOUTUBE SERIES

Phillip Human

It's a vlog's life

★★½☆☆

Release Date: OUT NOW!
Ten parts (Four to nine minutes each)
Distributor: Wildseed Studios
Director: Andy Mosse

PHILLIP HUMAN (PAUL Neafcy) is a vlogger. And like any other vlogger, he's keen to show viewers around his bedroom, introduce them to his pets, and get them to comment on his videos. Unlike most vloggers, though, Phillip is a monster – as in "Frankenstein's". Over the course of this 10-part web series, Phillip explores his weird world, and ultimately finds out what he's made of.

Slickly shot, with some impressive set design, there's a charming silliness to the series. Mostly, that's due to Neafcy's lack of self-consciousness, which lets him gurn and roll around with unconstrained glee. Underneath that silliness, though, is an awful lot of sadness. Phillip is a lost soul, a childlike persona trapped in the scarred-up body of a man, and while the initial joke is that he doesn't realise he's not normal, that soon stops being funny. Instead, it's just kind of tragic.

There's some smart subversion of internet memes in the latter half of the series, but all the action is saved for the last episode; given the format, that feels like a mistake, since the first few episodes don't offer enough incentive for viewers to come back for more.

The whole thing ends on a cliffhanger, but with most of the story's plotlines wrapped up, the biggest question it poses is, "Wait, how did he upload that?" If there's going to be a second series, the writers will need to find a way to inject more life into their horror comedy creation without turning it into a lumbering abomination. **Sarah Dobbs**

? The series also features Katy Carmichael, probably best known to *SFX* readers for her role in *Spaced*, as Daisy's friend Twist.

Box Of Delights

What we've been playing with this month

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1 Game Of Thrones Legacy Action Figures

Funko | Height: **13-16cm** | RRP: **£19.99 each** | FPI price: **£15.99 each** | Catalogue numbers: **B8585, B8586, B8587, B8588, B8588A**

Above the neck, the characters in this latest batch of *Game Of Thrones* figures are unlikely to trouble any lookalike contests. Further down, however, the amount of detail is impressive, with the craftsmanship on Daenerys, Arya, Robb, Brienne and Jaime's togs worthy of the finest tradespeople in Westeros – even if Danys's rubber-dress-over-trackie-bottoms look feels somewhat inappropriate. Each character comes with a weapon accessory, but the lack of a detachable hand on Jaime feels a bit of a missed opportunity.

2 Eighth Doctor Sonic Screwdriver

Character Options | Length: **21cm** | FPI price: **£9.99** | Catalogue number: **B5978A**

No, this isn't something from the *Fifty Shades Of Grey* accessories range, it's one of the latest wave of electronic *Doctor Who* sonics. This one was brandished by Paul McGann in the 1996 TV movie and it makes a "Biittzzzz!!!" sound (to quote the packaging) when you press a button on the base. It looks very like the models used by the Fourth and Fifth Doctors, though the red bit at the top does make it look a bit like a sonic lipstick. Maybe they should bring this version back when the Doctor changes sex?

3 The Walking Dead Bottle Opener

Diamond Select | Width: **6.5cm** | RRP: **£17.99** | FPI price: **£14.99** | Catalogue number: **B2227**

Once again testing to the limit the *SFX* hack's ability to write about practically the same piece of merch every month, here's another bottle opener from Diamond Select. Like the previous 15,967 it's made of sturdy metal, and has magnets on the back so you can slap it on your fridge. This one's shaped like a zombie that's had a shotgun blast to the face, and is impressively revolting.

4 Star Wars/Star Trek iPhone Cases

Zeon | Length: **12.5cm** | RRP: **£16.99 each** | FPI price: **£14.99 each** | Catalogue numbers: **C4885, C4888**

Bummed out that your perfectly adequate iPhone 5 now seems like an expensive paperweight thanks to the iPhone 6? Turn that :(into a :D with these cases. The hard plastic *Star Trek* communicator case may keep your phone safer, but having to talk into the back makes you look like Starfleet's most inept recruit. And having Han's grimacing fizzog poking into your thigh all day soon gets annoying, but you won't find a, ahem, cooler cover.

FUNKO PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

6 X-Men Pop! Figures

Funko | Height: 10-10.5cm | RRP: £9.99 each | FPI price: £8.99 each | Catalogue numbers: C2699, C2701, C2702, C2703, C2704

"Why oh why can't the X-Men wear their classic colourful costumes, instead of all that oh-so-trendy leather gear?" If you write angry missives to Marvel along these lines on a weekly basis, you'll be delighted by Funko's latest stylised vinyl figures. Plus, they've got wobbly spring-mounted heads, so while penning your next letter of complaint you can give one a quick shake and pretend it's nodding in agreement. From left to right we have Cyclops, Mystique, Storm and Colossus; the range also includes Professor X and Magneto.

5 Stormtrooper Travel Pass Holder

Underground Toys | Width: 10.5cm | RRP: £4.99 | FPI price: £3.99 | Catalogue number: B9601

Imagine how much you can brighten the lives of downtrodden ticket inspectors with one of these. "What's that? You want to see my ticket?" (Extravagant flourish) "This *is* the travelcard you're looking for. A-ha! A ha ha ha! It's A *Star Wars* reference you see. *A New Hope*, specifically. Quite witty, really." Fellow passengers will gaze on open-mouthed, in awe of your comedy skills. You'll probably end up making out with one of them before the next stop – tongues and everything. A Boba Fett version is also available.

7 X-Wing Mug

SD Toys | Height: : 9.5cm | RRP: £7.99 | FPI price: £6.99 | Catalogue number: B9507

Sometimes it's not what you put in a mug that matters – it's what's on it that counts. This desirable piece of kitchenware is adorned with future *Captain America* director Joe Johnston's original concept designs for the Rebel Alliance's snubfighter of choice, and they look stunning. S-Foils are set to both attack and, er, non attack positions, there's some handy annotations, and those who've really picked up their visual scanning will spot the incongruous big "5" by the cockpit and lack of R2 units.

THINGS TO COME

MORE GOODIES COMING YOUR WAY

STAR WARS 3D WALL LIGHTS

ETA: JULY

Do you have a nagging feeling that your living room would look much better if someone had forcibly rammed a *Star Wars* character's head through the wall? Then it's your lucky day! Following on from 3D Light FX's Marvel, Transformers and Ninja Turtles ranges are Vader/Yoda/Boba Fett LED lights, each of which come with crack-simulating stickers and a remote control.

FOURTH DOCTOR TALKING PLUSH

ETA: JULY

Much as we love Tom Baker's toothsome grin, it becomes truly terrifying once translated from flesh and blood into plush toy form. If you went to sleep with this in your bedroom, you'd probably have nightmares of being strangled with a scarf. Standing 9" tall, he says one of three phrases from the series when you give him a squeeze. Hopefully none of them is, "I bring Sutekh's gift of death to all humans".

BATMAN LOGO MIRROR

ETA: JULY

If there's one thing that's always bothered us when spending hours in a Sellotape-and-bin-bag mask, practising how best to make your chin look superhero-butch, it's the fact that a regular rectangular mirror does nothing to enhance the moment. Those days are behind us now; measuring 70cm by 33cm, this will transform even the humblest bathroom into a Bat-room.

VIEW SCREEN

TV REVIEWS AND OPINION

What's On

What to watch when this month

LOOK OUT FOR SFX TV REVIEWS AT GAMESRADAR.COM

- **Mondays** – The fifth season of *Game Of Thrones* comes to Sky Atlantic from 13 April. Meanwhile *Resurrection*'s on Watch, *Gotham* and *Person Of Interest* on Channel 5.
- **Tuesdays** – *Supernatural* and *The 100* on E4, *The Flash* on Sky 1, and *Extant* (until 15 April) and *The Originals* on Syfy. New episodes of *The Returned* go live on Netflix.
- **Wednesdays** – *The Vampire Diaries* continues to bite into Wednesday nights, while *Continuum* plays with time on Syfy until 22 April. New episodes of *Once Upon A Time* debut on Netflix.
- **Thursdays** – *Sleepy Hollow* is on the Universal Channel. Over on Sky 1, it's time for *Arrow* and *Forever.*
- **Fridays** – *12 Monkeys* continues to go viral on Syfy, and *Agents Of SHIELD* is on Channel 4.
- **Sundays** – New episodes of *Outlander* are now on Amazon Instant Video every week, just hours after debuting in the US.

BROADCAST UK: TUESDAYS ON E4 US: WEDNESDAYS ON THE CW

The 100

And the children shall lead

FOR A SHOW BASED ON ONE OF the worst YA novels ever written (no hyperbole, it's terrible) *The 100* has defied all expectations to become surprisingly gutsy, unpredictable, hard-edged and downright watchable.

Things didn't begin well, as the show worked its source material out of its system. For the first few episodes it appeared it was going to be exactly the ghastly, lightweight fluff the novel and the pre-publicity suggested. When a bunch of delinquent teens are sent from an orbiting space station back to a post-apocalyptic Earth to test if the planet was habitable again yet, it seemed like we were in for a season of *Dawson's Dystopian Creek*.

But then, a few episodes in, it went all *Lord Of The Flies*, becoming far more interesting with the kids all killing each other. Then the Grounders – the savages that native Earth people had become – arrived to add more threat, and the show became a halfway decent combo of *The Hunger Games* and *Survivors*.

With season two, even bigger changes stirred up the format, with the space station, the Ark, crashing to Earth, the Grounders threatening all-out war and some of the initial "100" being taken in by a group of humans forced to live inside a mountain bunker (they've become allergic to surface radiation). It takes a while for this new format to bed in and the start of the season is hampered with too many unconnected storylines all yet to build to a point. It compensates with so many "shock" deaths the show's in serious danger of making unpredictability predictable. In terms of story structure it's now using the *Vampire Diaries* blueprint – fully serialised, multiple plots, and lip service to giving any individual episode a beginning,

BONUS FEATURES

Reversing The Trend: While most other shows are abandoning opening title sequences for a five-second jingle, season two of *The 100* has suddenly gained a proper opening title sequence, and very impressive it is too, even if it does contain that big sci-fi cliché – a ruined Statue of Liberty.

Reversing The Trend 2: Raven was originally going to be killed off in season one but instead managed to be one of the few characters in the show to avoid death and was promoted to a regular.

Fooling No One: There are a lot of British actors doing very good American accents in US TV. Henry Ian Cusick isn't one of them. He sounds like he's doing a bad Dustin Hoffman impression.

Best Lines:
Clarke: "He did it for me."
Lexa: "Then he dies for you."

TALES OF WAR FROM THE GRIM DARKNESS OF THE FAR FUTURE
blacklibrary.com

"You're under arrest for not dressing like us!"

middle and end. At least all the hair product seems to have run out (apart from inside the mountain) and all the teens look suitably grizzly this year.

But as the season has developed and the stories have revealed their dark underbellies, the show's once again taken a leap forward in quality. The arrival of the grown-ups from the Ark has challenged the power structure the teens had established, and there's some meaty drama about the shortcomings of democracy in war scenarios. Inside the mountain all kinds of moral issue are rearing their heads about the right to human experimentation.

Admittedly the scripts are occasionally cringingly on-the-nose dealing with these issues, but at other times they're surprisingly subtle. While the teen-soap veneer is the very thing that may put certain viewers off, ironically the show works best when it lets the moral arguments seep into the relationship drama than the other way around.

The 100 is also becoming increasingly dark, both in a bleak sense (some of the "shock" deaths are genuinely shocking) and a black humour sense (there are some great flying limbs and gallows humour in a minefield episode). On the other hand, there's so much torture porn going on – rarely a week goes by without someone strung up and poked – you have to wonder if the CW's research team has identified teenage masochists as a hitherto unexploited audience demographic. There's gore, and then there's slightly discomfortingly fetishistic gore...

You do wonder what the writers are going to do to shake things up for season three, though. Alien invasion, anyone? **Dave Golder**

MINDPROBE

Sharlto Copley

Policing the impossible in *Powers*

What about *Powers* made you want to shift to TV?
There's some really good writing – if not debatably the best writing – in television, so we started looking at pilot projects. Last year this one came along and I thought it was interesting for several reasons. There was the PlayStation Network launch. Having been a founder of a television station, I'm very interested in where media is going and distribution. I also felt the show was a very different take on superhero and cop shows. And the social commentary aspect had something to say about power and fame which appealed to me.

Christian used to have powers as Diamond. Does he miss the abilities or the fame of his abilities more?
He certainly has a good heart and has humanitarian instincts deep down. When he sees a person in trouble his first instinct is to help them. But what I love about the universe is that it's set in Los Angeles, and all the [superheroes] are like famous people in the entertainment industry. Instead of a pop star advertising a cola on a billboard, you have Retro Girl.

How would you describe Walker and Deena's partnership?
There's a classic fun, buddy-cop chemistry with Deena and that I enjoy. But Deena is a detective and police officer in her mind, and Christian is a bit of a rock star in his mind. So it's interesting to watch that dynamic play out where Deena represents some sort of light for Walker and the better sides of himself at times.
Tara Bennett

Powers is currently airing on the PlayStation Network in the US. A UK airdate is TBC.

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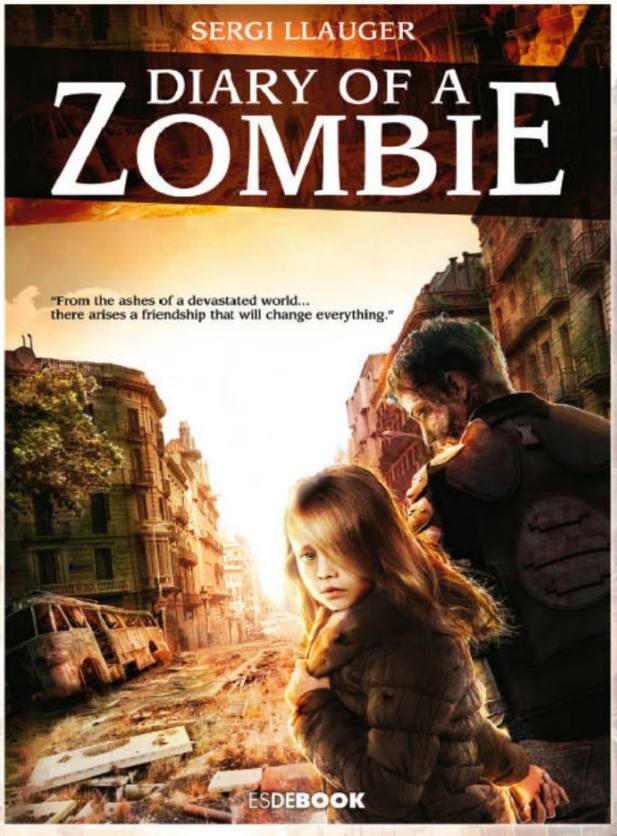

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Quite frankly we'd prefer *real* cockroaches.

BROADCAST UK: FINISHED AIRING ON ITV2 US: NO BROADCAST CONFIRMED

Cockroaches

Can life after the Bomb ever be funny?

SCIENCE FICTION HAS A somewhat fraught relationship with comedy. At its best, it's outstanding, using humour to pinpoint absurdities and highlight human interactions. At its worst it's clichéd and embarrassing, and more, something you know is going to be remembered and referenced by non-fans as evidence as to why SF is rubbish.

ITV2's recent *Cockroaches*, alas, was more of a *Hyperdrive* than a *Red Dwarf*. Essentially *Survivors* with jokes, it's set ten years after a nuclear attack has destroyed Britain as we knew it. At the time of the attacks, friends Tom and Suze did what anyone would do faced with death, and had sex. Ten years later they (embarrassingly) survived and now have a young daughter with whom they have to face the post-apocalyptic world, joining a dysfunctional group of misfits camped out in the woods, raiding supermarkets and generally failing to set up any kind of new civilisation or functioning society.

It's an interesting premise; we're used to seeing post-apocalypse dramas where the skilled and knowledgeable people rise to the fore, whereas *Cockroaches* examines what happens when the group of survivors contains no one of any talent. Unfortunately, interesting thought experiments – like what happens when your only doctor turns out to be a psychopath – are barely even played for cheap laughs, hinted at, then glossed over and thrown away. But don't worry, there'll be another masturbation joke in a minute.

There are brief moments of potential – the *Wicker Man/Human Centipede* set-up at the end of episode one is great. But this is about easy jokes rather than interesting consequences. All of which would be forgiveable if it was funnier, but it's not.

There's also no emotional truth to the characters. Suze cheats on Tom in the first episode, and they bicker about it as though she'd burnt their tea. Tom agrees to have sex with the doctor (Alexander Armstrong) in exchange for an antidote to cure his daughter; it turns out she was faking her illness for attention and any emotional repercussions from what was essentially rape are totally ignored.

Science fiction can examine great vistas and universal concepts; comedy can pull apart the minutiae of human interactions and the petty routines of day-to-day life. *Cockroaches* – crude, unfunny and dull – does none of those things. There is an interesting comedy to be made about life in a nuclear wasteland. But this isn't it. **Rhian Drinkwater**

BONUS FEATURES

Nitpicking: Yeah, we know it's a low-budget comedy rather than high-concept dystopia. But the green make-up when all the children fall ill in episode four is appallingly bad.

Most Chilling Moment: When the children take their revenge on the deceitful doctor, crowding around him with knives ready for a real-life game of Operation. Cut to credits.

Best Line:
Suze: "I wish we could Google this."
Zorbotron's father: "Google?! I'd settle for Bing. I'd Ask Jeeves. I am desperate."

Most Apt Line:
Suze: "This isn't a film."
Tom: "Well, I wish it was. This is boring."

YOU HAVE BEEN WATCHING... THE FLASH

SFX's Facebook followers give their verdict on the speedy DC show

It's great fun and a worthy companion piece to *Arrow*. Different tone but still feels part of the same universe, and the crossover episodes are a blast too. Personally, I love both shows – that's allowed, isn't it?
Steve Jewess

I never watched *Arrow* but wanted to get in on this from the start. Great superhero TV, makes *Gotham* look like the po-faced yet tonally unbalanced mess it is.
Neil Tex Hickman

I actually started watching *The Flash* first and enjoyed it so much I went and watched *Arrow* from season one. Glad I've watched them both now as they're brilliant. Makes a change from the Marvel Universe too.
Daniel Pearce

It provides a fun counterpoint to the darkness of *Arrow*. The two complement one another well.
Robert Elliott

Arrow is brilliant but sometimes you need something slightly less heavy and *Flash* fits the mould perfectly. I am also enjoying the nods to the comics.
Kirsty Leanne

There's no denying *The Flash* is enjoyable in places (great visual effects and an inherent sense of fun and wonder when it comes to Barry's powers) but the storytelling feels like it's going through the motions on a weekly basis.
Rob Stewart

Better than *Arrow*, but could be grittier. A little too *90210* for me.
Steve Barker

I don't really like it and don't like how it's in the same universe as *Arrow* when it's a lot more fantastical.
Shane McEntee

Closer to *Smallville* than *Arrow* in terms of tone but this is not a bad thing. It is a lot of fun and the story arc is very intriguing.
James Metherell

We like, we like... but there's something we're looking forward to more...

BROADCAST UK: AIRED ON DISNEY XD US: AIRED ON DISNEY XD

Star Wars Rebels

The Force doesn't seem to be asleep

SO THIS IS THE SHOW THE much-loved *Clone Wars* was cancelled for, seemingly for no better reason than the new Disney-era Lucasfilm has a mission to standardise and canonise all ongoing *Star Wars* expanded universe output. It's not quite the first product of the new Lucasfilm Story Group – that honour goes to the game *Star Wars: The Old Republic – Galactic Starfighter* – but it's the most significant, as fans scour episodes for possible Easter Eggs: characters, concepts or hardware that may turn up in the new trilogy.

The show was always going to have a bumpy ride living up to the expectations of *Clone Wars* fans, and a lazy – but difficult to avoid – criticism to throw at it is that *Rebels does* feel a little Disneyfied. Rather than having its predecessors' massive canvas of characters between whom it could pick and choose to concentrate on with each episode, the new show centres on one crew of rebels (six if you include the droid). Of these, Ezra Bridger is often front and centre; he's a teenage trainee Jedi and would seem to be an obvious "identification" figure for the Disney Channel's key audience. The characters' designs also have a more cutesy feel and the colour palette is brighter, reflecting a superficially lighter, occasionally slapstick tone to the scripts.

All true. And yet you shouldn't write the show off as pure kiddie fodder from an initial viewing. While a couple of episodes are little more than throwaway fluff, if you keep watching, you start to see the depth of the show developing, and realise that the nuts and bolts of what makes *Star Wars* such an enduring franchise are still in evidence. The characters reveal hidden depths and the camaraderie and/or animosities between them become more intriguing.

The battle scenes are often breathtakingly realised, the hardware feels authentic, it's genuinely funny in places and there are plenty of clever cameos from familiar characters. Yes, it's more Disney, but it's still very much *Star Wars* and streets ahead of the channel's other SF fodder (*Lab Rats*... shudder!). **Dave Golder**

BONUS FEATURES

- **Old Friends:** *Clone Wars* favourite Ahsoka Tano returned in the *Rebels* season finale, answering that big "where is she now?" question from the previous show.
- **Did You Spot?** Sabine has painted a picture of Cad Bane from *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* on the wall of her cabin on the Ghost.
- **Best Line: Kanan:** "Do or do not. There is no try." **Ezra:** "What does that even mean?"
- **Most Bat's-Arse Line: Kanan:** "I could really use Hera on this side of the pig right now."

BROADCAST UK: AVAILABLE ON AMAZON INSTANT VIDEO US: FINISHED AIRING ON NBC

Constantine

John's ablaze but little else sparks

HALF THE BATTLE WHEN launching a new supernatural procedural series is getting your lead right, both in terms of casting and characterisation. That's made even trickier when the character is pre-existing, because then the TV version comes with the baggage of expectation.

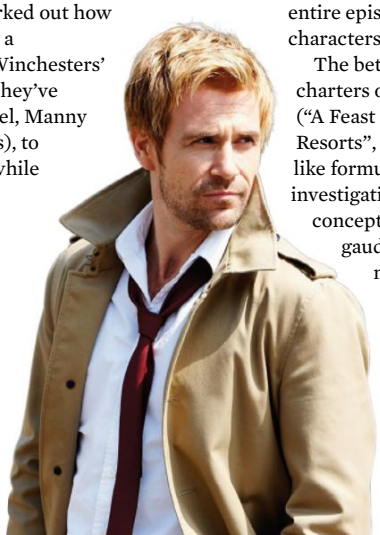
In this respect, NBC's stab at *Constantine*, based on the cocky, chain-smoking demon hunter from DC's *Hellblazer* comics, has landed a winner. Welsh-born Matt Ryan gets his tongue round a passable Scouse accent but, more importantly, *feels* like gnarly, snarky, world-weary John Constantine of the comics. The hair may be a little Tintin, but the scowl is authentic (certainly much more than Keanu Reeves' confused frown in the film version).

Sadly, the rest of the show is less sure-footed, as if showrunners David Goyer and Daniel Cerone haven't quite worked out how to make it something other than a *Supernatural* spin-off with the Winchesters' long-lost Liverpudlian cousin. They've even introduced an ongoing angel, Manny (not a character from the comics), to make the parallels even closer, while stories about voodoo and urban myths feel so familiar in the TV landscape you can't help groaning the first time you hear the word "Chupacabra".

The regular supporting cast are decidedly humdrum too. Admittedly, rewrites and changed plans mean that Zeb (vision-seeing female assistant) and Chas (muscle with multiple lives) keep vanishing for entire episodes, but they never come alive as characters or have much chemistry with John.

The better episodes are inspired by charters or plots direct from the comics ("A Feast Of Friends", "The Saint Of Last Resorts", "Waiting For The Man"); others feel like formulaic *Scooby-Doo*-style spooky investigative filler. Some deliciously dark concepts in the scripts feel sanitised by a gaudy, glassy shooting style that looks more comic strippy than truly suits the subject matter.

But whenever Constantine is centre-stage and sarcastic, the show discovers its voodoo hoodoo. **Dave Golder**



BONUS FEATURES

- **Try This Out:** Normally phone numbers used in US TV shows don't connect to anything, but dial the number on John Constantine's business cards (404 248-7182), not forgetting to add 001 at the start if you're in the UK, and you'll get a pleasant surprise.
- **Plagiarism!** A lot of Zed's drawings of John Constantine are actually bits of artwork from the covers of *Hellblazer*, drawn by Tim Bradstreet.
- **It's Wossisname!** Constantine's mate, Ritchie Simpson, is played by Jeremy Davies who you may remember as Daniel Faraday in *Lost*.
- **Best Line: Constantine (to Manny):** "You know, you're like a blister. You only turn up when the hard work's done."

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SPURIOUS AWARDS

Celebrating the silliest moments from the month in TV

LEAST LIKELY MERCHANDISING SPIN-OFF OF THE MONTH

Sadly we don't think McVitie's will be licensing these biccies from *Person Of Interest*.

CONFESSION OF THE MONTH

The Vampire Diaries' sheriff closes about a dozen historic murder cases in roughly 30 seconds when Damon goes through the files saying, "Me... yup, me... Me again..."

INTERBREEDING OF THE MONTH

The Troll King from *The Hobbit* clearly had a fling with a Vogan to produce this guy in *Star Wars Rebels*.

BOARDGAME MAKEOVER OF THE MONTH

Papa Midnight in *Constantine* finds a new twist on KerPlunk.

SPRAY TAN OF THE MONTH

Alternatively, Restraint Of The Month – awarded to ourselves – as we manage not to get smutty with this water pistol moment from *Grimm*.

COMEBACK OF THE MONTH

A nation cheers when Bobbi Morse tells Hunter that his fake American accent makes him sound like a douchebag, and he replies, "Now you know what it feels like for me to live in this country."

COINCIDENCE OF THE MONTH

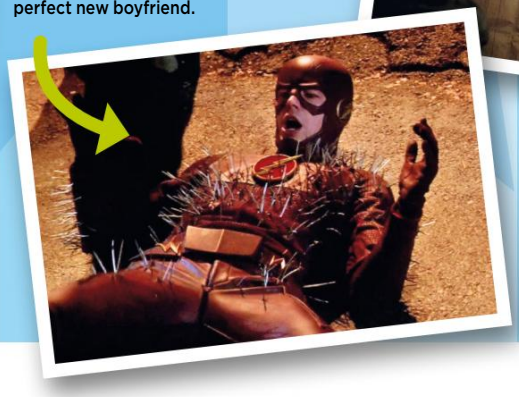
In *Agent Carter* Dotty watches Professor Ivchenko tap out a message on a window sill via a rifle – on *Person Of Interest* Reese did nearly the very same thing!

BIZARRE WEAPON OF THE MONTH

Star Wars Rebel Ezra Bridger appears to have made himself a light-staple-gun.

CROSSOVER OF THE MONTH

The Flash is affected by the Terrigen mist from *Agents Of SHIELD* to become Raina's perfect new boyfriend.



SCI-FI EUPHEMISM OF THE MONTH

When Bellamy needs to get to a high security area in the mountain base in *The 100*, he's told, "You can get there through the retro-fit zones". The rioters are fooling no one. That's just technobabble for "ventilation shafts".

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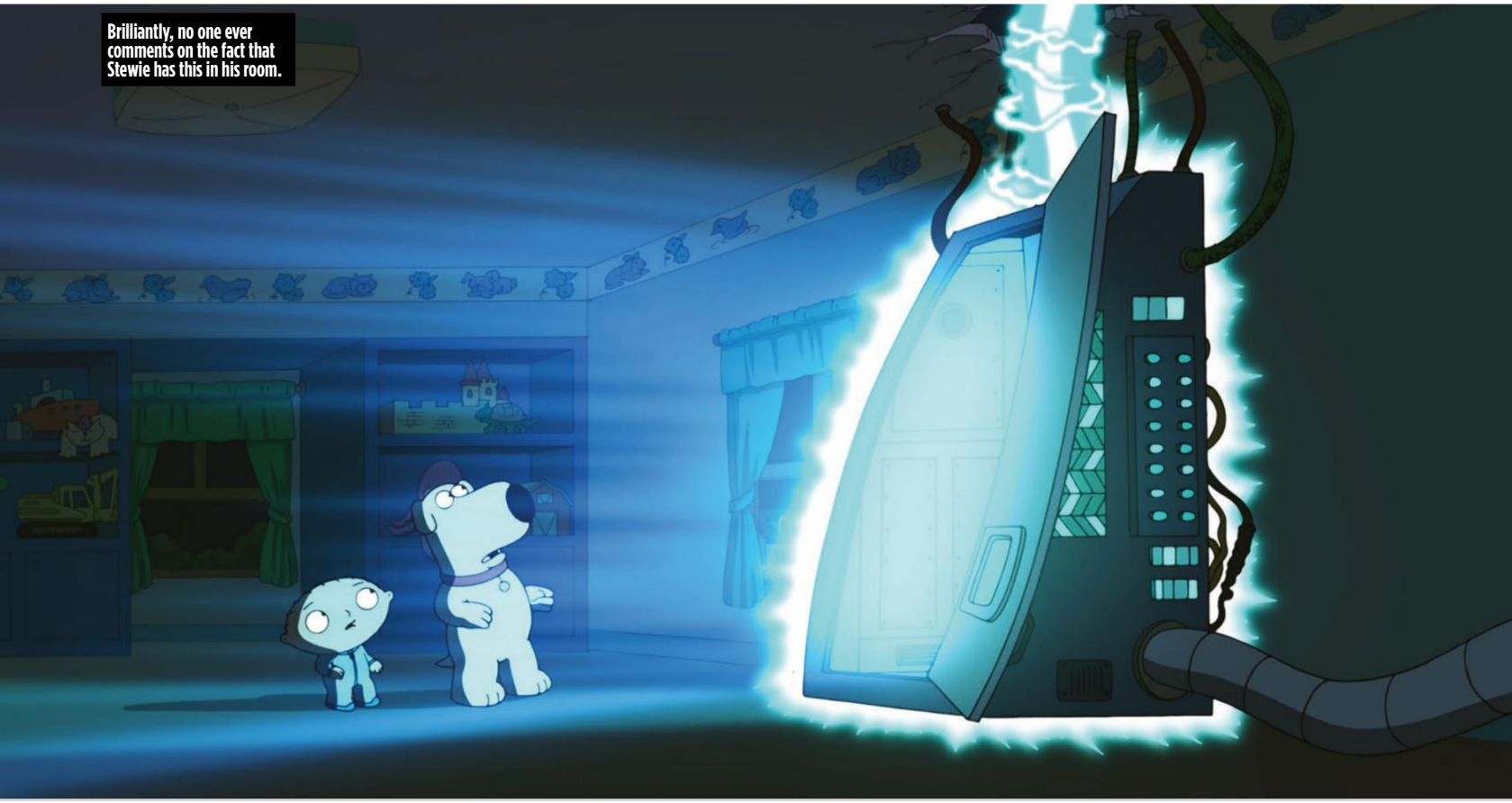
Sci-Fi in Family Guy


Brilliantly, no one ever comments on the fact that Stewie has this in his room.

RUSSELL LEWIN, PRODUCTION EDITOR

There aren't many television shows that I watch every episode of, but *Family Guy* is one. Now into its twelfth season, Seth MacFarlane's animated comedy series is still maintaining a supremely high standard.

But it's not science fiction, I hear you cry. Well, you have a point, sort of: *Family Guy* is not a show that gets coverage in *SFX* – except when they do one of their *Star Wars* spoofs. Obviously it's not intrinsically sci-fi in the way of *Doctor Who*, *Continuum* and all the others, but it does have big science fiction elements. I appreciate that these are all part and parcel of its fantastical comedy universe, but I reckon it still deserves some *SFX* attention!

The biggest sci-fi element in *Family Guy* is Stewie's time machine; yes, the time machine built by the baby of the house, the time machine that sends him and close canine pal Brian on amazing adventures. It was first used in season one episode "Mind Over Murder", when Stewie creates it to avoid painful teething. Later he becomes more ambitious: in season 10's "Family Guy Viewer Mail No 2" he uses it to travel back in time to 5 April 1994 to stop Kurt Cobain from killing himself by convincing him to eat lots of Haagen-Dazs ice cream. (It works, but back in the present Kurt is now morbidly obese.)

In season 12's "Chap Stewie" the toddler makes a new version of his time machine to change his conception, so he becomes part of an upper-class British family (he then tires of this and builds another one to get back to his normal life). In 2015 episode "Stewie, Chris & Brian's Excellent Adventure" the trio do an extensive history tour and end up on board the doomed Titanic. (And in "Road To The Multiverse" Stewie creates a remote control that lets them visit various parallel universes.)

What's great about all this timey-wimey madness is that it exemplifies *Family Guy*'s freewheeling creativity. I'm in awe at the quantity and quality of the show's gags and love that almost nothing's off limits. What an engaging, libertarian, secular, democratic, fun-loving outlook this programme has, in my view, all the best qualities there are, and throwing into the mix that sci-fi staple the time machine is glorious proof of this. SFX

FACT ATTACK!

- *Family Guy* began in 1999 and has so far clocked up 238 episodes. It airs on Fox and BBC Three in the UK (often).
- Ex-Batman Adam West plays... Mayor Adam West.
- *Family Guy* has so far done three *Star Wars* spoofs, of *Episodes IV-VI*. The reason they got clearance is that George Lucas is a fan of the show.
- *Star Trek* is often referenced on *Family Guy*, and the entire cast of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* guested on the show. Seth MacFarlane appeared in two episodes of *Star Trek: Enterprise*.

SEE YOU NEXT MONTH! WEDNESDAY 29 APRIL DETAILS ON PAGE 25

THE SKULL THRONE OF KRASIA STANDS EMPTY . . .

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